

CATHARS

Gardner Rich

FIRST THINGS

This is a rewrite: the reconsideration of an unplayable, even unreadable, three-act play written in 1975. At that time, I had no idea how to go about saying what I wanted to say. This time, I am writing to find out what I want to say, without worrying how to go about it.

The play is based upon events that occurred during the so-called Cathar Wars. Forty years ago, less was known of the Albigensian Crusade than is known now, and it was harder to lay hands upon unreliable sources. Hypertexts have solved half of this problem.

Finally, in 1975, I took liberties with the sources available to me. In this reconsideration, I am ignoring new interpretations *and* taking considerable liberties with the original play.

-- Gardner Rich

In memoriam

Dennis Paul Goeltl

(1950-2014)

Dramatis Personae

RAYMOND-ROGER DE TRENCANEL : Viscount of Carcassone

EXCAVATUS : his fool and counselor-sans-portfolio

AGNES : Viscountess of Carcassone

DENYS : cousin of Raymond-Roger

HIATUS : a mendicant friar knowledgeable of the vintages of Rousillon

JOHN CHRYSALIS : a Cathar

EVELYN RUAH : also one of the Cathari and a traveling companion to John

CLOTILDE : handmaid to Agnes.

A SERVANT GIRL

ARNAUD-AMAURY : Abbot of Citeaux (later Archbishop of Narbonne; herein conflated)

FIFI : a small dog

1st ASSAYER and 2nd ASSAYER

AN ASSASSIN

GUARDS

1st MARSHAL and 2nd MARSHAL

SOLDIERS

THE USUAL ASSORTMENT OF SERFS AND RURAL TYPES (some given names)

MIS EN SCENE: The stronghold at Carcassone, circa 1209.

PRELUDE: Satie, *Trois avant-dernières pensées*, II. Aubade – séguez to:

Satie, *Embryons Desséchés 2: d'Edriophthalma*

ACT ONE, Scene 1

[ENTER: EXCAVATUS and HIATUS, talking and walking, as music fades]

HIATUS

God's teeth!

EXCAVATUS

Good money after bad! Which is foolishness, I know! But they'll break his legs. Worse, cut off his nose!

HIATUS

Then this is a matter of some urgency. A matter that will admit no delay! A matter of life and...

EXCAVATUS

(Interrupting) You're so right, Hiatus! I knew you would grasp it!

HIATUS

Why, it's perfectly clear! Ah, me. A gambling debt, you say?

EXCAVATUS

A drunken bet on the next-slowest horse in Christendom – the slowest being that blue meat Boucher sells for beef. Can you imagine wagering on a horse named 'Hobbles'?

HIATUS

You must have been very drunk! How much did you lose?

EXCAVATUS

No, my friend, not I! A soldier in the guards. Clotilde's brother.

HIATUS

Oh, I see! Her ladyship's handmaiden approached you in behalf of her brother, did she? That wine-and-dine wastrel!

EXCAVATUS

(Goading) Judge not lest ye be judged, good friar. Clotilde's brother is young, and perhaps a tad feckless...

HIATUS

(Interrupting) And you, Excavatus, would serve a handmaid! Am I right? You should know better, my old friend. But ah, the fair Clotilde! I understand. Don't think I haven't eyes. I was a man once, too, you know! I mean, before I took a vow of poverty ... and all the rest of it.

EXCAVATUS

Look! See who comes!

(Falling immediately silent, EXCAVATUS and HIATUS bow from the waist)

[ENTER: RAYMOND-ROGER and AGNES]

AGNES

Your cousin?! You mean Denys is here now, all the way from Toulouse?

RAY.

He rode all night. Looks it, too. (Seeing them) Ah, Excavatus! Up with the birds to enjoy our unseasonable weather?

EXCAVATUS

Yes and no, my lord. This is supposed to be August.

RAY.

Yet it feels like November, I know. And you, good friar! Good morning.

HIATUS

(Bowing again) My lord. And Lady Agnes!

AGNES

(Nodding) Friar Hiatus, good morning.

RAY.

Rest assured, Hiatus. I have not forgot my pledge. But this morning, my cousin has arrived from Toulouse. In haste, I might add – a matter of some urgency. Surely St. Peter, who has an eternity before him, has patience enough to wait one more day upon my purse.

HIATUS

Just so, my lord. Peter's pence, *Denarii Sancti Petri*, knows no deadline. My lord is as sagacious as he is generous!

RAY.

Yes, well ... There it is. Tomorrow, then. And now, you will excuse me. Time for the morning dispatches. Come away, Agnes. (Takes her hand)

AGNES

(Lightly) By your command.

RAY.

Please. Let's not overdo it.

[EXEUNT, RAYMOND-ROGER and AGNES]

EXCAVATUS

Right! Now then, good friar, you will loan the money? I promise to return it, as soon as his lordship pays my retainer. A few days, at most. Repaid with interest!

HIATUS

No, my friend. No interest. Inanimate things cannot bear children. I am a monk, not a money-changer. If this soldier's debt is within my means, the same will I lend you. In a word, you shall have it.

EXCAVATUS

Blessings, friar! But when?

HIATUS

Tomorrow, after his lordship opens his purse. (Taking EXCAVATUS by the arm, and moving toward the door) With St. Peter paid, you may keep your pledge to the fair Clotilde!

[EXEUNT]

[Interlude: (music up) Poulenc, *Mouvements perpétuels* No. 3 – the final 18 measures, marked "un peu moins vite / gris / *pp* / les deux pédales"]

ACT ONE, Scene 2

(Later that same morning, in a room with a terrace. It is raining.)

[ENTER: AGNES, accompanied by TWO SERVANTS, talking together.]

AGNES

Rain, rain, rain! Wouldn't you know it?

BOTH

Yes, my lady.

AGNES

Clotilde, you know how I count on you. Implicitly. Both of you.

CLOTILDE

Yes, my lady!

AGNES

Good! You must make every effort. You know how I worry! But, if we all do our parts, all will be well.

CLOTILDE

Yes, my lady. There's no need to fret. We will do our best.

SERVANT GIRL

Indeed, my lady. Everything will be just as it should be.

CLOTILDE

You will see!

AGNES

Oh, what's wrong with me? I can depend on you. It's just that the Viscount... he's all meat-and-potatoes... and this evening that won't do. Oh, I hope he likes squab. (Pausing to think) And music. Yes! That *would* be nice! Something new. But what? An estampie? Yes, I want Thierry to compose an estampie. And a ballade! Tell him!

BOTH

(With curtsies) Yes, my lady.

[EXEUNT]

(AGNES, alone now, looks about the room quickly, then settles into reverie. She begins to hum. Gathering her pelisse and gown, she dances lightly to and fro, her eyes intent upon her feet, as she prances onto the terrace.)

[ENTER: RAYMOND-ROGER, who watches from the side.]

RAY.

(Bounding onto the terrace) Caught you!

AGNES

Oh! You nearly scared me to death! Very nearly, I say. (Smoothing her pelisse)

RAY.

Oh yes, I can see that.

AGNES

And your cousin?

RAY.

Bathing, I should think. I would surely want a bath had I come from Toulouse. (Teasing) Nearly scared you to death, did I? That'll be the day. You women, you always know when you're being watched.

AGNES

(Feigning indifference) You don't say.

RAY.

(Circling her) Yes madam, I do say. In fact, I insist upon it. (Confessionally) I've a sixth sense, too, you know. (Standing before her) And it tells me something's in the air! The household is *a hive*, all these busy little bees swarming. Maids running here, valets there. And strange odors from the galley, everywhere. Now tell me: What is that stench I'm smelling? Is it *squab*? And here you are, dancing!

AGNES

Dancing? Is that a sin? Is John Chrysalis crying out in the streets again? At least for once he's not following you, like one of your hounds.

RAY.

John Chrysalis, the thorn in my heel! But come, Agnes. Let's not trifle. I know something is afoot. An evasion will hardly distract me from that hypothesis. But, if you must, have your little secret and your fun. Never mind. (Looking out) What a beautiful morning! No wonder you were dancing. Except for this gray rain, our skies would be blue and the air would be balmy, with a zephyr, perhaps, from the south.

AGNES

What shall I do with you, Raymond-Roger? I see the long face, behind the smile. All the same, I *do* appreciate the effort you are making!

RAY.

Effort? What effort?

AGNES

At merriment, my lord.

RAY.

That's no effort. Not while the sun is shining.

AGNES

Fiddlesticks! Stop play-acting and tell me, what is it? What news has Denys brought?

RAY.

Bad news, I fear. Prepare yourself! According to Denys, his stargazer calls for an extended period of scattered showers. Then, cloudy to partly cloudy. Then, the dawning of the Age of Aquarius.

AGNES

That's a water sign, my lord.

RAY.

So then, more rain and a Second Flood.

AGNES

(Maintaining patience) How I always love our little chats, Raymond. Answer me this: Why do I put up with you?

RAY.

Obviously because I am handsome, charming, powerful, and rich. Not to forget intelligent, humane, and modest to a fault. Why would you *not* put up with me? Aren't these many virtues sufficient?

AGNES

They are sufficient, yes, but only one of them is necessary. Now listen: If you think you can distract me with this...

RAY.

(Interrupting) My God, you are lovely! Simply beautiful. In every respect.

AGNES

Beautiful, desirable, and clever – in that order?

RAY.

Yes, in that order. Would you prefer that I lie? I saw you, did I not, and you me, before we spoke. Will you deny it? Think on it! Oh, this land of poor grapes and fair women, one sous a parcel.

AGNES

Yes, yes. Lovely women, everywhere – and you, in your eligibility!

RAY.

Thou sayeth! So, in the final analysis, you may conclude it is yourself, gentle Agnes, which compelled me then... and which compels me now. In a word, your mind.

AGNES

My mind? That's two words, my lord.

RAY.

So it is, my lady, and you have proved my point.

AGNES

(Moving closer) Enough play, I say. Even now, as we banter, you are staring out the window. So tell me!

RAY.

But I haven't spoken with Denys, yet. He's still... I'm just... I mean, we're young, Agnes, and we've never been outside the Occitan! Haven't you ever wondered how far is *far*? Can you imagine Jerusalem or Cathay? I'm not complaining. I know that we belong here, in Carcassone. (Touches her cheek) And, I know that we have a duty.

[ENTER: DENYS, naked, wrapped in a blanket. He trips, stubbing his toe.]

DENYS

Ach! Jesus Maria, that hurts!

AGNES

Denys!

DENYS

You're here, then! Good morning, Agnes, though it's nearly noon. I didn't mean to intrude on a private matter.

RAY.

Of course not, but what are you doing? Have you had a bath?

DENYS

Not yet. Presently.

RAY.

Not yet? It's cold! Have you taken leave of your senses?

DENYS

(Coughs) Would that I could... take leave of my senses, yes, and be done with it!

AGNES

What? (Turns to RAYMOND-ROGER) What is he saying?

RAY.

Don't listen to him, he's jesting! Aren't you Denys? Tell her you're jesting.

DENYS

No, cousin. This time, I am quite determined.

AGNES

Oh, no! (Shaking her head) Not again! Another *endura*, is it? Another final exit? With you, soaking wet, lying upon cold flagstones every night?

RAY.

It's nothing of the sort, Agnes. Denys isn't killing himself. Are you, Denys?

DENYS

Yes, well. It's different, this time. (Coughs)

AGNES.

Come, Denys! You don't believe that Catharist nonsense. You can't be serious!

DENYS

(Coughs) I am.

RAY.

Don't speak that way! "I AM." "I am that I am." You are contingent. Utterly. An amalgamation of fire, air, earth, water!

DENYS

Have you forgot? (Pointing heavenward) "Ye are gods!"

RAY.

So it is written. But it is also written that Adam was made from earth and God blew air into his nose! Where, pray tell, are the fire and the water? Beware of tropes!

DENYS

(Not comprehending) Beware of what?

RAY.

Figures of speech. Metaphors, similes, all that. Tropes!

DENYS

Tropes? (Coughs) Whatever. Whatever you say.

AGNES

(To DENYS) A horseman with no horse sense! You're absurd! What does this make, the third go-round? (Turning to RAYMOND-ROGER) He's *your* cousin, not mine! (Turning back to DENYS) Just see if you are welcome at the banquet, swaddled like that and sneezing! No, wait! You can be tonight's entertainment!

RAY.

Ah! So that's it! That's why all the scurrying about.

AGNES

Now I've done it. It was supposed to be a surprise. Nothing too fancy, just a bit of a change. It's been so gloomy lately. I just thought... oh, never mind! It's spoiled now. See what you made me do, Denys?

DENYS

(Sneezes) I'm not sure what it is, exactly, that you think I have done; but I can assure you, dear Agnes, that I am always disappointing someone for some reason. Day in, day out, ever since the... the 'mishap'. Jesus Maria, why!? Why didn't the arrow kill me? Better to die like Dagobert than die like this! (Turning to RAYMOND-ROGER) That's why I've come, don't you see? Your uncle wants me to keep living – wretchedly – and keep the vows!

AGNES

The vows?! What, no milk, cheese, meat, or eggs? Of course not! These come from beasts fornicating! Can't have that, can we! Oh my, the purity of abstaining from life! No more wine for you! Well, your father notwithstanding, I say sink the vows!

DENYS

Easy for you to say! The Cathars are everywhere. If you were Agnes of Albi, instead of Montpellier, then what? Or, if *your father* was Toulouse, then you would see!

AGNES

I sincerely doubt, my dear Denys, that my having *your father* for a father would make a difference. But look, this is pointless. Let's not argue.

DENYS

All right... you're right. And I apologize. I mean it. Sincerely.

RAY.

So, there it is. (Changing the subject) Well then, as you've planned something special for this evening, we might work up an appetite. What say you, Agnes? How about riding?

AGNES

(Controlled) What say I? Riding in the rain? You're as daft as your cousin. Go on, then. Get the croup!

DENYS

Excellent idea! I'll join you, Raymond! You and I, like old times!

RAY.

Hmm. Tomorrow, perhaps. No, tomorrow I cannot. The tax assayers will be out, and one needs to keep an eye on them. Can't tomorrow.

DENYS

So why not now, then? What's a little rain?

RAY.

(Distracted) No, no, I've changed my mind – and you need a bath. A good hot one. Besides, for now I must speak with Excavatus, wherever I may find him. (To AGNES) You haven't seen him this morning, have you?

AGNES

(Exasperated) On my oath, you are rarely yourself this morning! Of course I've seen him. And so have you, my lord, only a short while ago!

RAY.

Ah, that's right. We did see him – with Friar Hiatus. Then he must not be too far afield. Never mind, then, I'll find him, I'll find him...

[EXIT]

DENYS

My cousin still prefers the counsel of the court's clown, does he?

AGNES

Excavatus may be a jester, but he's no fool. He is unlike the others. Raymond says Excavatus is without ambition, whereas even the Pure Ones themselves want something.

DENYS

And you, Agnes, what do you want?

AGNES

Me? Something like peace and quiet. In any case, fewer theatrics ...

[ENTER: FIFI, a small dog]

AGNES

So, here you are, Fifi, and wet too! Come on, we need to get you dry. You, too, Denys. Come on! Let's not overdo it.

FIFI

Arf!

DENYS

(Aside) Fewer theatrics and a bit with a dog.

[EXEUNT]

[Interlude: Poulenc, *Trois Mouvements perpétuels*, No. 2 (fading at "clair mais p" – *i.e.*, on the repetition, omit the final two measures)]

ACT ONE, Scene 3

(Later in the day, in a sparse room. EXCAVATUS, pensive and alone, is surveying the world through an open window.)

EXCAV.

Noah's raven! Yet more rain – and another day with four walls. (Touching one) Damp walls, too, and dreary. (Looking) Four of them. My own universal constant: North wall, East wall, South wall, *and* West wall. Compassing the bustle of the house. Commotion for the sake of commotion. No need to ask why, with such heaviness in the air, and this rain for the sake of rain: no longer to slake parched earth or replenish streams – just rain for the sake of rain. An end in itself. (Afterthought) Until it makes an end.

[ENTER: RAYMOND-ROGER]

RAY.

Talking to ourselves again, are we, Excavatus?

EXCAV.

Watching pigeons, my lord. Or rather their absence. They must be somewhere – nesting in pairs. Curious creatures. Nothing like village dogs. Some say they mate for life.

RAY.

Ah, pigeons and dogs – each according to its kind. Methinks you spend too much time alone with your thoughts. Nor have we shared our thoughts, you and I, in too long a time.

EXCAV.

Conversation is difficult, my lord, impossible even, when you are accompanied... followed... *hounded* by those two *you-know-who's*.

RAY.

Ah, yes. John and Evelyn. The Pure Ones. Better still, the Perfects.

EXCAV.

The very same.

RAY.

Have you forgot already? Our good Bishop of Albi sent them to us...

EXCAV.

(With resigned sarcasm) Heaven be praised.

RAY.

Indeed. Publicly, his Grace is concerned for my spirit – entrapped as it is, in this (looking at hands and forearms, then striking his belly) my ostensibly evil prison of flesh. Such he calls it. The prison of flesh.

EXCAV.

Oh, surely. After all, does not our heterodox bishop mean well by everyone? I, for one, thank him for the Pure Ones who follow wherever you go, on his Grace's command, at all times, in all weathers. Save for today, it seems. How odd! Have John and Evelyn simply abandoned you to the rain? Have they no fear you may drown? For when it comes, that blessed moment when life hangs by a shear thread – just before you breathe your last – these Perfect Ones must baptize you *by light*. Surely a pure light – clear and coherent. Or so I've heard.

RAY.

(Having heard it all before) Yes, yes – that's the teaching. In my view, a final flash in the face of infinite darkness. As you well know: *Lights out*, I say. But then, which one of us can really say for sure? Admit it. The Cathars may not be wrong.

EXCAV.

The same happened to your cousin, has it not? The physician removed an arrow from his back and said that Denys would be dead by dawn. So, the Pure Ones were summoned.

RAY.

Yes, he converted – not unlike Constantine the Great, only the emperor had sense enough *to expire*. Unlike my cousin. Poor Denys *lives*, and now he is strapped by such vows of asceticism and chastity that... (Shaking his head) He's tried starvation *twice*!

EXCAV.

Ah. I remember. He was here then – and couldn't resist Agnes's blueberry tarts.

RAY.

Just so. But tasty tarts, whether blueberry or perfumed, no longer sustain him. Denys finds no satisfaction in anything. He's quite beside himself. He cannot break the vows, and he cannot keep them. His position has become untenable. He says everything looks black, and he wants to die – yet still he insists that it must be done the Cathar way. So go figure.

EXCAV.

The *endura*. To speak frankly, my lord, methinks he's muddled. Yes, I know that vows are sacred. But *duty* obliges him to adhere to such tenets as these? What, the renunciation of the body? Well yes, there are rules and practices! He cannot simply drink a potion or slit his wrists. That's beyond the pale. No, it must be the *endura*, which is one thing, while suicide is quite another. Such is expert opinion.

RAY.

There it is. But wait, my friend. There's more. Do you know? The Count of Toulouse has taken vows, and Denys's mother, too.

EXCAV.

Then they have sworn not to forswear. That's one for the lawyers.

RAY.

Leave it there, then. One can see this is chess, not checkers.

EXCAV.

If this is chess, then it's the Albigensian Gambit. The problem is political, as well as religious. Not everyone has your tolerance, my lord. Have no doubts: it will get worse – now that Castelnau is poisoned.

RAY.

What? The papal legate? Pierre de Castelnau, you say?

EXCAV.

Yes, Pierre de Castelnau. The very same. You did not know?

RAY.

How have you learned this?

EXCAV.

By carrier pigeon, from Montpellier. Only this morning.

RAY.

Montpellier? Does Agnes yet know, I wonder. Ugh! Bad tidings, this! More than bad! You are astute about our pontiff! He stalks about like a lion, seeking to devour someone. Our third Pope Innocent has been preaching a crusade. A crusade, mind you, not in Holy Lands, but here, in Christendom!

EXCAV.

Then he must think Christendom needs rechristening. And perhaps instruction in the catechism. The one true doctrine, with an army at its back.

RAY.

This poisoning will be the pretext, I fear. What's to stop him, Excavatus?

EXCAV.

I don't know. Maybe John of England. Maybe.

RAY.

Because he might seize Anjou and Normandy, is that it?

EXCAV.

(Shrugging) Do you doubt that Philip-Augustus is wary of that possibility? With so much loot to be had, why else does he stay aloof from the papal designs?! Holy war indeed! A crusade would fill his coffers.

RAY.

Ah! First, it was missions...

EXCAV.

Bernard and Dominic.

RAY.

Yes – the Cistercians and Friars Preachers. They tried to persuade. Things progressed, but not to their liking. Now it's Innocent threatening to launch the Apocalypse.

EXCAV.

Then we agree. With Castelnau dead, Innocent will be sending no more missions. No need to worry about that! And if I am wrong about John of England, then he will not hesitate to use force.

RAY.

Let's hope that you are right. Toulouse is strong, and Carcassone well-fortified, but always, there remain unforeseen circumstances.

EXCAV.

I'm not sure I take your meaning.

RAY.

I mean, sometimes this world is caught up in gears. Machinations.

EXCAV.

Ah, you mean the Devil, my lord.

RAY.

Perhaps. Metaphorically speaking.

EXCAV.

Yes, my lord. As you say. It may be metaphor.

[Interlude: Poulenc, 5 *Impromptus*: No. 1]

ACT ONE, Scene 4

(It is evening in a banquet hall of restrained sensibility, with hearths at opposite walls and logs ablaze. The ambiance of torchlight is intimately low. A few guests are seated around a long table, some with dogs at their feet. Servants wait attentively. THIERRY is playing the lute.)

AGNES

Do you like the ballade, my love? Thierry composed it, especially for tonight. He plays well, don't you think?

RAY.

He does. And this is tasty squab, Agnes. I may come to prefer it.

AGNES

Let's not overdo it, my lord. We know you prefer venison.

RAY.

No, truly. This is quite tasty. Almost like frog legs, which, in their turn, taste like chicken.

AGNES

Enjoy. You may be eating it again tomorrow, so few guests are here.

RAY.

To be honest, I'm surprised to have guests at all, the rain being with us. It's miserable damp, out there.

AGNES

Few enough were invited, to keep things simple and spare you having to play the host. A little merriment, that's what I wanted, and some new music. Not just for myself, but for you. I thought we might lift your spirits.

RAY.

Consider them lifted. Still, tomorrow it's the tax assayers.

AGNES

Not to put a damper on the evening! What am I to do with you?

RAY.

What must be done needs be done, Agnes. I've been mulling it over, is all.

AGNES

You think too much, I say. Twice over.

RAY.

That's exactly how I scolded Excavatus. We talked this morning. He had news from Montpellier...

AGNES

Some word from my family? Is someone ill?

RAY.

No, no – nothing so serious. But as I say, I've been thinking about revenues.

AGNES

Please, Raymond, nothing serious tonight! I've gone to all this trouble...

RAY.

(Interrupting) But it's on my mind. Come on, Agnes. I promise to be brief.

AGNES

All right, then. Seeing as I've remarked your long face and wondered what you are thinking. Be brief, as you promise.

RAY.

Briefly, then. Autumn has come early, yes? So, no doubt, winter will be unusual. Crops are meager and prices are dear. On top all this, the tax is a burden. This year, especially. Well, the point is that I see no point. Not in the normal levy.

AGNES

What are you suggesting?

RAY.

That we treat people as people, not as beasts of burden or as the means to our ends. After all, their lives make our lives possible. Do you follow?

AGNES

Yes, I follow. You are right: our fortunes are tied. You're a good man, Raymond. I know you will be equitable. We have enough, here in court.

RAY.

So, there it is. That's all I have to say. Was I brief? I know you dislike talk of money.

AGNES

As we're on the subject, my lord, there is one other small matter. It's Clotilde. I promised to help her. This time, I'll be brief. You see, in order to help her brother, she's made an arrangement to borrow a small sum.

RAY.

To help her brother? The brother in my guard?

AGNES

He's the one. The situation is this: Clotilde's brother needs money because...

[ENTER: EXCAVATUS, agitated, walks directly to RAYMOND-ROGER, his entrance interrupting AGNES]

AGNES

(Looking up) Raymond, it's Excavatus! He doesn't look jolly.

RAY.

How now, Excavatus?

EXCAV.

Apologies, my lord, but it's urgent! You have uninvited guests! The monk, Hiatus, is here in company.

RAY.

Hiatus? With how many others?

EXCAV.

I didn't count the train of attendants.

RAY.

A monk with a retinue?

EXCAV.

No, my lord. It is Arnaud-Amaury who has a retinue.

RAY.

The archbishop! Here? Oh, I get it. One of your little pranks!

EXCAV.

Not this time, my lord.

[ENTER: JOHN CHRYSALIS followed by EVELYN RUAH, walking slowly in step]

RAY.

(Seeing them) Now that can't be! The archbishop *and* the Perfects, together again, for the first time? Ah, that's rich! It's you, Agnes! You've organized the farce!

AGNES

Not I! I know nothing of this, my lord!

RAY.

Oh, a coincidence, then. What's the proverb? 'When it rains, it pours'?

EXCAV.

No, no – they *are* here, my lord. Really! As Hiatus says: God's teeth!

RAY.

More like God's dentures, if you ask me. All right, they're here. I believe you. Now what to do? We are hardly prepared to receive them!

JOHN

(Joining them, at last) Likely the archbishop will not stand on formality.

RAY.

Ah, John. And Evelyn. Good evening to you.

EVE.

(Mumbling, perhaps praying, under her breath. Her head is bowed.)

AGNES

I have it! Give them lodging for the night and say you will meet them tomorrow.

EXCAV.

My lord, Amaury insists upon speaking with you now.

RAY.

Yes, he would do! All right, then. Show him in, thank you, Excavatus.

[EXIT: EXCAVATUS]

RAY.

(To the others) I pray you all, don the cloak of civility.

JOHN

Servility, more like.

RAY.

(Snapping) Spare us your puerility, pennywise!

[At that, guests fall silent around the table, and the music stops. They stand, ill at ease, without speaking. After a moment, RAYMOND-ROGER begins to pace.]

RAY.

(Vexed) Why this silence? Play on, Thierry! Anything!

THIERRY

(Bowing) My lord. (Resumes playing)

RAY.

Eat, everyone! A squab a day fights tooth decay! Now why would I say that?
God's teeth!

[ENTER: EXCAVATUS, leading ARNAUD-AMAURY (crook in hand), followed by
HIATUS. Before Excavatus can make a proper introduction, Amaury speaks brusquely...]

EXCAV.

My lord, the Archbishop Arnaud-...

ARN. AM.

(Interrupting) Greetings, Viscount Trencavel, and Apostolic Benediction, which I carry from his Holiness, Innocent, the Vicar of Christ, who would have it known that he hesitates to give unto you the Apostolic Benediction, for it has come to the attention of the Holy See that you, Lord Raymond-Roger, are lenient toward those who are in sympathy with the Catheters.

HIATUS

(Humbly) Catharists, your Grace.

ARN. AM.

(Whispering harshly to Hiatus) Your assistance in this address I do not require.
(Turning to Raymond) Further, it is widely known that your city harbors Jews and heretics, a policy described as "open gate".

RAY.

I know nothing of heretics. As for the sons of Sarah, I find they are skilled in calculation and bookkeeping.

ARN. AM.

The sons of Sarah?! Abraham, you mean! You *do* mean to signify the Jews?

RAY.

(Patiently) But Arabs are also sons of Abraham. Isaac and Ismael had the same father, but different mothers. Jews are the sons of Sarah. Arabs descend from Hagar.

ARN. AM.

That servant girl is not the issue! The issue is the heinous heresy rampant as leprosy, here, in the Lane Duck!

HIATUS

Langue d'oc, Your Grace.

ARN. AM.

Languedoc, confound it! Well, how do you answer? Do you acquiesce to that so-called Bishop of Albi? Do you consort with Cathars? Are you in sympathy?

RAY.

In sympathy?

ARN. AM.

Need we parse the question?

RAY.

(Evenly) In this city, they are free as anyone to follow their consciences, yes.

ARN. AM.

How liberal of you. Have you any comprehension how tolerance of this lunatic fringe plays out? Your immortal soul is at stake!

JOHN

A fiery stake, forsooth. We needs pose a question to this "archbishop".

ARN. AM.

God forfend! Am I to answer a heretic?

HIATUS

(Oil on troubled waters) What harm, your Grace, can follow from reasoning with this man? Perhaps he will see the error of his argument and return to Holy Mother Church. You have oft said that truth will out, your Grace.

ARN. AM.

Truth? What has *that* to do with...

JOHN

(Interrupting) Is the Pope the supreme authority in matters both spiritual and temporal?

ARN. AM.

If you don't know, why do you ask? He is the Vicar of Christ on earth, being less than God but more than ordinary men.

AGNES

And extraordinary women?

ARN. AM.

(Ignoring her) Innocent himself has declared so, *ex cathedra*.

JOHN

Then the Pope is placed in an exalted position by that same God who places superior authorities in their respective positions?

ARN. AM.

Is this not a foolish question? Of course it is the same God!

JOHN

And this God is the same as created the world?

ARN. AM.

(Patience at an end) Trifles! Absolutely, you clodpate!

JOHN

Then the Pope must be evil – and surely we are not to follow evil.

ARN. AM.

The Pope evil? Are you mad? You impugn the very Pair of Cheter!

HIATUS

Chair of Peter, your Grace.

ARN. AM.

(To Hiatus) Impertinent buffoon! Chair of Peter! (Turning to John) And as for you, you impious mule... You blaspheme the Church and the Blessed Virgin, and I won't have it! Anathema!

JOHN

(Heedless) Listen and learn, "archbishop"! A God that is good cannot have made anything that is evil, and this world is an evil place. Therefore, *this world* is the work of Satan. If the Pope is appointed by the creator of this world, then, *a fortiori*, the Pope must be evil.

ARN. AM.

(Gathering steam) By the wounds of our Savior and the relics of all the saints, anathema! Anathema!

JOHN

(Contemptuously) Anathema yourself! Your Pope is the tool of the Demiurge!

EVELYN

(Chanting) Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Our father, who art in heaven...

ARN. AM.

(As Evelyn prays) And now, they appropriate the Our Father! Next, they will be hailing Mary! Twisted doctrine! Enough, I say! May God judge them! And you, Trencavel? Where do you stand?!

RAY.

(Hesitating) Where do I stand?

AGNES

Don't answer him, Raymond. I will. I have something to say in this!

ARN. AM.

You would speak for your husband? Gad, everything is topsy-turvy!

AGNES

I would not presume. No, in this matter I speak only for myself. I am weary of arguments and petty holiness! These Cathars may sound crazed to you, but compare them with your clergy! More often than not, the monks you send here on "holy missions" are gluttonous

and drunk! Compared to these Cathari, your clergy are worldly and pale beside their discipline. They seek the pleasures of the world, not the fruit of the spirit.

ARN. AM.

You would deny Bernard and Dominic, who were as worthy as any saint, in favor of this perverted piety?

AGNES

I would neither condemn nor canonize anyone! Nor would I wear a haughty countenance and stand in scarlet splendor while serfs live in squalor!

ARN. AM.

You would criticize the Pope's emissary?

AGNES

If the shoe fits! Sorry, I meant to say silken slipper.

RAY.

Please, Agnes! Enough now. You've had your say.

ARN. AM.

Indeed. So now I'll have mine! You, Lord Trencavel, may not subscribe to this twisted cosmology, but you perpetuate it by being tolerant! You permit these Cathars to conduct all manner of vile excess and promiscuity! Before leaving this earth, they need only recite one Our Father and receive what they erroneously call "baptism by light" – and then all is forgiven! These Cathars even claim there is no original sin! God forbid, they make preposterous claim to being the only True Church!

JOHN

"By their fruits ye shall know them."

ARN. AM.

Enough! I will not haggle with heretics! As God is my witness, I have withstood as much babbling as I can endure! Anathema! Into the outer darkness, all of you! (Casts aside his crook and turns away)

[EXIT: ARNAUD-AMAURY]

[ALL standing in stunned silence. Lights down]

[Interlude: Poulenc, *Les Soirées de Nazelles*, var. IV: "La suite dans les idées"]

ACT ONE, Scene 5

(Much later. RAYMOND-ROGER and EXCAVATUS, alone together, remain seated in the banquet hall)

EXCAV.

(Peering into an empty goblet) What hour is it?

RAY.

(Pouring more wine) Well past the witching, but not yet Old Nick's.

EXCAV.

Then the sunrise is three hours away. But will it shine, I wonder? There's no patter on the roof. I think the rain has stopped.

RAY.

For now. And the house sleeps as though nothing has happened. Meanwhile, here are we, you and I, awaiting the sun. Mithra, some say; others say the sun is a separate entity – and still others, Apollo's chariot! Now, Apollo's son – what was his name, Phaeton or Photon... something like that, and methinks the wine is talking.

EXCAV.

Yes, here we are – but where are we, my lord? Have we been excommunicated? Three "anathemas" and the archbishop throwing his crook to the ground. Isn't that how it's done? Thoughtful of Friar Hiatus to fetch the stick and run after the dog.

RAY.

Ah, that. Well, my parents were Catholic but lapsed into heresy, as Rome saw it. I'm told this happened while my mother was carrying me. So, seeing as I've never been baptized, how would excommunication make a difference? Now it's your turn. Tell me, Excavatus, have you been sprinkled?

EXCAV.

My parents took me to be baptized, yes. I really had no say in the matter.

[ENTER: THIERRY, holding a small piece of paper.]

RAY.

Why, Thierry! What brings you? Is something amiss?

THIERRY

(Bowing quickly) My lord. It's this. (Holds out the paper) It must have come after the guests took leave. It's my fault. I should have looked – before now, I mean.

RAY.

(Taking the paper and reading; then, speaking to Thierry) Does my cousin know of this?

THIERRY

My lord, how could he? I've only just now discovered the message. I've come to you directly.

RAY.

Yes, of course you have. I wonder, where is Denys? He failed to show himself for dinner.

EXCAV.

He's been nowhere in sight since morning. Yesterday morning, by now.

RAY.

(Sans sarcasm, speaking as a matter of fact) Then he must be out somewhere, lying upon stones or bricks – or, in one puddle or another.

EXCAV.

Perhaps he's gone to the woods. Do you think he'll manage, this time?

RAY.

Who knows whether any of us will manage, this time? Listen to this: (reading) "Toulouse is excommunicated and his lands are under interdict". This came via one of your pigeons, Thierry?

THIERRY

Yes, my lord. I heard a ruckus from the coop and found the bird with the message caught in the trapdoor. Dumb luck, to find it so soon.

RAY.

You did well to look. Thank you, Thierry. I won't detain you. By the by, I much enjoyed your new music.

THIERRY

(Bowling) My lord. I bid you good night.

[EXIT: THIERRY]

RAY.

How now, Excavatus, with Toulouse booted in the exterior *pontifex maximus*?!
What more may we expect from one who uses his crook as a cudgel -- who would rather sheer
his flock than shepherd it?

EXCAV.

One thing is clear enough, my lord: Rome has one view, Albi another, and neither
accepts this city's tolerance. Your open gates, my lord, may be attacked from either side. Or yet
a third, should the Moors in Spain decide to annex these lands.

RAY.

Then we must approach Barcelona and Aragon! Seek their support. Am I not the
vassal of King Pedro?

EXCAV.

Of course, Aragon and Barcelona! And you should enlist your uncle, now that
Count Raymond is an ex-communicant. He won't waver.

RAY.

No, he won't! We'll write them all, and have Thierry release the pigeons – the
sooner, the better.

EXCAV.

Immediately, then. (Begins to take leave)

RAY.

Finish your wine, first. Otherwise we'll appear desperate.

EXCAV.

But there's no one else in the room, my lord.

RAY.

(Looking about) How right you are. Force of habit, on my part, appearing
nonchalant. Come, we'll go together. There's no time to waste!

[EXEUNT]

[Entr'acte: Ravel, *Oiseaux tristes*]

ACT TWO, Scene 1

(Morning of the following day. A courtyard. A queue stands before a table at which sit two ASSAYERS, one calculating with an abacus, the other making entries in a ledger. Behind these two stands the watchful RAYMOND-ROGER.)

RAY.

(Pointing at the ledger) To my eye, that 'two' appears to be 'seven'. Take pains to write clearly, lest someone be cheated.

MAN (at head of queue)

(Turns to nod at those behind him)

ASSAYER 2 (at the ledger)

Yes, my lord. Accidents happen. There. This one's done. Next!

MAN (at head of queue)

(As he departs, speaking to Raymond-Roger) My lord is kind.

[EXITS]

ASSAYER 1 (with the abacus)

(Impatient) Next, please! State your name and the number of your family.

NEXT MAN 1 (with a wife standing beside)

Père Maille. It's just the two of us. We've no children.

ASSAYER 2

No children, and yet you are called 'Père'?

MAILLE

My sainted mother named me, sir. After my father.

ASSAYER 1

Ah, that explains it! And what work do you?

MAILLE

Well, last year, I was a shepherd. But not now, sir.

ASSAYER 2

Then how do you support yourselves, you and your wife?

MAILLE

We pick berries in the woods and glean the fields. Sometimes I snare a rabbit. Once I killed a deer.

RAY.

(Intervening) Kill my deer? What have we here, an honest poacher?!

MAILLE

(Looking down) From need, my lord, yes.

RAY.

An honest poacher *and* a shepherd with no flock to tend? We must remedy that! Find you a new situation ... and return you to the tax roll! Tomorrow morning, then – bright and early, mind you – report to the bailiff outside the main gate. Nothing more for now. Nothing due here. And no more deer, do you hear me? Next time, no leniency.

MAILLE

(Bows) Bless you, my lord.

[EXITS]

ASSAYER 1

Next! Come on, step up!

NEXT MAN 2

Daniel Tiel, sir, and Eustace, my wife all these years. She's not well, sir, or she'd have shown herself this morning. Sick abed, she is.

ASSAYER 2

(Looking up from the ledger) We've not seen you at this table before, have we?

RAY.

(Cutting in) Indeed! This fellow is from Beziers – are you not, my good man?

TIEL

Just so, my lord! We came in the spring, did Eustace and I. But why should my lord remember me?

RAY.

Oh, that's not difficult. It was after a hunt. You mended harness for me, as good as new. Daniel Tiel, is it? So what brings you, Daniel, you and your wife?

TIEL

Better circumstances, my lord – our first ever tenancy! Yet we may well lose it to gray skies and constant rain. Our grapes remain green, and now the roots rot.

RAY.

Alas, 'twill be a poor year for *vin de pays*, they say.

TIEL

Pinot, my lord. The vines are mostly pinot. My lord knows their temperament!

RAY.

Let's hope your grapes are not meant for vinegar! I could use a pipe of good pinot. We shall speak on this again, come the feast of All Souls. Nothing due here.

TIEL

(Taking leave) Yes, my lord. A pipe! The first of November.

[EXITS]

ASSAYER 2

(Aside to Raymond-Roger) My lord, why are we here? Your coffers...

RAY.

(Interrupting) ...should cover their mouths, when they cough.

ASSAYER 2

(Returning to the ledger) Yes, my lord.

ASSAYER 1

Next, please!

[The queue advances.]

[ENTER: HIATUS, from the side. He passes before the table, the queue opening for him]

RAY.

(Seeing him) Ah, good morning, Friar! I could guess why you're about so early of a morning. Remember the patience of Peter. Presently, I say – the pledge shall be fulfilled, presently!

HIATUS

Oh, you mean to say Peter's pence, my lord? Just now, I'm in search of a crust of dry bread and a bowl of congé! Otherwise, there is no hurry. I must away, with your gracious leave!

RAY.

You have it, then. And you shall have it, this afternoon!

HIATUS

Praise, my Lord Trencavel! Until then, fare thee well!

[EXIT HIATUS, crossing paths with EXCAVATUS, who enters]

EXCAV.

What ho, Hiatus, and well met! Can you see your way clear to...

HIATUS

Yes, I know, the fair Clotilde! Presently, presently! But first, my breakfast! This afternoon, then! We'll meet this afternoon!

EXCAV.

Until then, good friar! (Continues toward the table and calls out) My Lord!

[EXIT, HIATUS]

RAY.

What news, Excavatus? Surely you've not come to spell me!

EXCAV.

Not I, but someone must have cast a spell – to unleash hell, withall.

RAY.

Let's not waste time constructing rhyme! You're in a state! What is it? Tell me straight.

EXCAV.

An urgent word, my lord, elsewhere or out of earshot.

RAY.

Over there, then! (Comes from behind the table to take Excavatus by the arm) Afraid of ears among peers? Spies and eyes? Why fret so on surveillance?

EXCAV.

My lord, you don't know who is within these walls! Carcassone teems with transplants and refugees.

RAY.

I understand the implication. Are you suggesting we expel everyone to send away a spy who may just as easily be one of our own? There's no end in that.

EXCAV.

No, my lord, not I. Others. Others complain of thieves and layabouts, while still others say they lose pay to the newcomers.

RAY.

All the same, many avail themselves of cheap labor.

EXCAV.

Yes, my lord. Well-to-do merchants can afford to pay cheap labor. Tradesmen, serfs, and midwives are another matter. Still, I wonder: How can layabouts be taking work away from locals? Perhaps they are part-time layabouts.

RAY

. So what's all this, then? Why so secretive?

EXCAV.

I've heard this city has been infiltrated! In any case, an army is on the march!

RAY.

An army? Are the Moors coming up from Spain?

EXCAV.

On the contrary – one is coming down from Ile-de-France. Philippe Augustus is on the move.

RAY.

How do you know this? Thierry's swift pigeons, I suppose.

EXCAV.

As you say, my lord, bad news is on the wing.

RAY.

And in the other direction? Has Thierry sent a bird to King Pedro? And what of Barcelona?

EXCAV.

The birds were released before dawn, my lord. Perhaps an answer will come tomorrow or the next day. There's nothing yet, from Toulouse.

RAY.

The force from France: how many are coming down?

EXCAV.

Five thousand strong – or ten, with knights in the vanguard.

RAY.

Knights? Then that means batteries, too. We must fortify! These walls are strong, but...

EXCAV.

We have need of defenders! How can we stand against ten thousand?

RAY.

There is Toulouse! And if Foix, Montpellier, Narbonne, and Rousillon join arms, we will make an account of ourselves!

EXCAV.

What of conscription, my lord?

RAY.

Conscription? Training takes time, but I'll think on it.

EXCAV.

No, there's no need for conscription. These people will fight for you with scythes and pitchforks, if they must!

RAY.

Off with you, Excavatus, my friend. Stay with Thierry, and report to me when you have something. Meanwhile, I have this (gesturing toward the table) to attend.

EXCAV.

Soon, my lord!

[EXIT, EXCAVATUS]

[RAYMOND-ROGER returns to stand behind the table]

ASSAYER 2

(To the head of the queue) All right, we're done here. You may go. Look lively!

ASSAYER 1

Next!

NEXT MAN 3

Pol Rudel, if you please. That's my name.

ASSAYER 2

(While inscribing) Pol... Rudel...

RUDEL

Yes, your Worship.

ASSAYER 2

What did you call me?

RUDEL

Why, I called you 'your Worship', your Worship!

ASSAYER 2

(Shaking his head) Unlettered bumpkin!

ASSAYER 1

Unwashed, you mean! Hasn't bathed since Easter, if then!

RAY.

That's quite enough. Let me tell you: this man, whatever his habits, makes your life possible! Or are you so blind?

ASSAYERS 1 & 2

(Resuming their attention to work) My lord. / Yes, my lord.

RAY.

(Peering at the ledger) Pol Rudel. Pol Rudel. Ah, yes. You came last year from Toulouse, did you not?

RUDEL

That I did, my lord. I've been in the woods since, cutting firewood for these good people in town.

RAY.

That growth on your chin? I don't remember it.

RUDEL

My lord has keen eyes, to be sure. My wife tells me I've a blank face, without it. I look stupid, she says.

RAY.

Surely not. But the beard does lend... distinction. How are your family?

RUDEL

Our daughter is to marry come the new moon. With your permission, my lord!

RAY.

Who is it that asks for her hand?

RUDEL

A farmer in County Toulouse. Jean is his name. Jean Vartan.

RAY.

And you, Pol. Do you approve of the match?

RUDEL

I do, sir! He's nature's gentleman, and a hardworking lad.

RAY.

Then, by all means, let them marry!

RUDEL

Thank you, my lord.

RAY.

Now, to the matter at hand. You must have heard, Pol, that taxes have been reduced. Lowered through the coming winter. Still, there's a quota for woodcutters.

RUDEL

What do I owe, my lord? I know nothing of taxes here in Carcassone.

RAY.

The harvest has been lean. In normal conditions, tax is one-fifth of a farmer's crop, one in five of newborn lambs, and so forth. But this year, the levy is one in ten.

RUDEL

But what do I owe, my lord? Being a woodcutter. You've yet to tell me!

RAY.

A question, first. In a wet year, dry wood must be hard to find, is it not?

RUDEL

It's not been easy, my lord.

RAY.

I thought as much. (Sizing up the taxpayer) Then you owe me two bundles, Mr. Rudel. And this week, two day's labor in the flax fields. We'll square things come Spring.

RUDEL

Tomorrow, my lord! I'll be afield before you see the sun!

RAY.

Very well. That's all then. Best wishes to your daughter, Pol!

RUDEL

(Taking leave) I'll tell her, my lord!

[EXITS]

[ENTER: HIATUS, on the return crossing]

RAY.

Good friar! A word, please. (To the ASSAYERS) Carry on. Be equitable. Just imagine yourselves to be standing in front of this table. (Leaving the table) And write legibly!

ASSAYER 2

As you will, my lord.

ASSAYER 1

Next, please! State your name.

NEXT MAN 4

(Cupping his ear) What was that?

HIATUS

(Enjoining Raymond-Roger) Has the time come, already?

RAY.

It has. If you'll follow me...'tis time to pay Peter by robbing Pol!

[EXEUNT: RAYMOND-ROGER and HIATUS. Lights down fast.]

[Interlude: Poulenc, *Trois Mouvements Perpétuels*, No. 2 (très modéré)]

ACT TWO, Scene 2

(In the late afternoon, at the same table, CLOTILDE sits playing backgammon with ASSAYER 2. Also present is ASSAYER 1, who, in his role as referee, sits between them.)

CLOTILDE

(To Assayer 1) Ha! At last! Now I've got you!

ASSAYER 2

(To Clotilde) You're feeling frisky, are you not?

CLOTILDE

(Embarrassed) Maybe a little. But, all morning, I've had this feeling that today is the day! Do you understand? *My day!*

ASSAYER 1

Yes, perhaps so. You are well-positioned in the home board, and but a single checker in your outer board. Excellent! Well done, Clotilde! But still, are you sure that you wish to double, yet again?

CLOTILDE

Yes, of course, another double! I can feel it!

ASSAYER 2

(To Assayer 1) Then she leaves me no choice. (To Clotilde) All right, I accept the double. And it's my turn to roll (releases dice from the cup) ...ah, well. Will you look at that? Five and three! (Advances a checker while counting) One, two, three, four, five! Safe enough. And, as you can see, the three lands me just here. (Looking up at Clotilde) Sorry, my dear, but your checker goes to the bar!

ASSAYER 1

(Collects the checker from the outer board and places it atop the bar) And now it is your turn to roll. Best luck!

CLOTILDE

(To Assayer 1) Worse luck, you mean! (To Assayer 2) But no problem: you've only two primes in your home board. I trust they are not insurmountable. (Rolls) Off the bar!

(Consternation. ALL THREE look at the result, considering it.)

ASSAYER 1

I'm afraid the die is cocked against the bar. You must roll again.

CLOTILDE

(Disheartened, drops the dice into her shaker cup) Yes, I know the rule! Well then, I need only avoid two numbers!

ASSAYER 2

That's right. A simple matter! You need but roll again, to be off the bar and pass the primes!

CLOTILDE

(Blowing on the shaker, then releasing) Away!

ASSAYER 1

Oh, no! Two and six! Still, no need to worry. (To Assayer 2) Your turn.

ASSAYER 2

(Rolls) Doubles! Double six helps immeasurably! (Moving checkers from Clotilde's outer board) Welcome home, my darlings!

ASSAYER 1

(To Clotilde) Worse luck! Another prime in his home board! Now it's your turn, my lovely. You'll need a one, three, or five.

CLOTILDE

(Rolls) Not again! Two and six!

ASSAYER 1

(Shaking his head) Pity! A crying shame! (To Assayer 2) Your roll.

ASSAYER 2

(Rolls) Doubles! Can you believe it? Double five! (Moves pieces from his outer board into the home board) A perfect prime! Next roll, off they go!

ASSAYER 1

My-oh-my, a perfect prime! And you can bear off. (To Clotilde) I'm afraid you're blocked, utterly. This means it's his roll, once again.

ASSAYER 2

(Rolls) Doubles, again! (Bears pieces off the board)

ASSAYER 1

There you are, Clotilde! Now there's room for your escape! Roll a double six and fly away! Good luck!

[ENTER: EXCAVATUS, wearing a cloak and holding a small pouch]

EXCAV.

Ah, here you are!

CLOTILDE

(Looks up) Oh, Excavatus! You're here! You remembered!

EXCAV.

Yes, of course! We have an appointment. (Comes to the table) What's this? Playing backgammon!? (To the Assayers) Are you two at it, again?

ASSAYER 1

I don't know what you mean, "at it"! It's just a friendly game! We're giving her a chance to...

EXCAV.

"We" did you say? "We" are giving her a chance!? Then I suppose you must be playing as the referee!

ASSAYER 1

(Rising from the table) I object to your manner and your tone!

EXCAV.

(Drawing a short sword from under his cloak) My manner has an edge, and my tone is honed! (To Clotilde) What did you roll last? Tell me!

CLOTILDE

Four and three. Why?

EXCAV.

Roll again! Now!

CLOTILDE

(Rolls the dice) Four and three.

EXCAV.

What a surprise! (To the Assayers) All right, off with you! Take the board, but leave the dice. Away with you!

ASSAYER 2

But she owes money! From yesterday. Here she is, with a chance to win it back! That's fair, isn't it? We're just giving her a chance!

EXCAV.

And I'm giving one to you, as well, right now. Clear off! Nor do I want to hear of you playing backgammon again – not with the likes of her. Do you hear me? (Sticking the sword to his belly) Are you listening? If I don't run you through this time, next time his lordship will do it! Now off with you! But leave the dice! Now go!

ASSAYERS

(Grudgingly, they gather the board and checkers)

[EXEUNT: ASSAYERS]

EXCAV.

Sorry about this. But you never know, with those two. They are very, very slick.

CLOTILDE

Are they Jews or Gypsies? You've saved me, then!

EXCAV.

No, no, no. Neither Jew nor Gypsy. Perish the thought! They're sharpers, that's all. Bad men in a world over-teeming.

CLOTILDE

And I'm foolish! Naive, at the very least. I thought I could...

EXCAV.

(Interrupting) Help your brother. Yes, I know: he needs money, and fast! Here, take this (offering the pouch), please. Now tell me: does he still have his nose?

CLOTILDE

(Laughs from relief) Yes, I think so! I mean, he still had it this morning! Tonight is the danger! (Feeling the pouch) You mean, this is all of it, then?

EXCAV.

Yes. All of it. As promised.

CLOTILDE

Oh, thank you! A thousand times, thanks! (Kisses him on the cheek) How can I ever repay you? But, of course I will! And soon! I swear to you. As soon as I can. I promise, cross my heart.

EXCAV.

There's no need for that. No need to trouble your head, at all. It has been... no, *it is*... my pleasure, believe me. So, there's no need, you see.

CLOTILDE

You are kind and generous, just like his Lordship. But you, wielding a sword!

EXCAV.

Yes, well. I was a soldier... before I became a fool. You know how I strive to be different.

CLOTILDE

My white knight, you are! I knew this was my lucky day!

EXCAV.

Luck, destiny, fate, who knows? It's true: sometimes the best plan is to find good fortune, somewhere. But not playing backgammon. Or betting on slow horses.

CLOTILDE

My brother, you mean. Yes, I must find him. Right away!

EXCAV.

Shall I and my sword accompany you?

CLOTILDE

No need. I can manage!

EXCAV.

As you will. Off you go, then! Hang onto that pouch!

CLOTILDE

(Departing) You bet I will!

EXCAV.

Oh, no! Wrong verb!

CLOTILDE

Right! Talk soon!

[EXIT: CLOTILDE]

(EXCAVATUS watches her, sheathes the sword, and exhales deeply)

[ENTER: HIATUS, from the opposite side]

EXCAV.

(Sees him) Hiatus! Good timing... and twice in one day! I'm parched! Are you buying?

HIATUS

There she goes! The fair Clotilde, is it not? You gave her the money, then.

EXCAV.

Thanks to you, yes. Again, thanks, my friend.

HIATUS

Rather we should thank St. Peter, I say! Raise a glass to him, what do you say – you being parched and all!

EXCAV.

Are you buying? I'm bust at the moment.

HIATUS

Well then, if water can be changed to wine, perhaps so can Peter's pence.

EXCAV.

You're my alchemist!

HIATUS

Speaking of which... There is a matter I wish to discuss with you. A business proposition, you might say. Specifically, the wine business.

EXCAV.

Wine business? Me? What do I know of wine?

HIATUS

You know what you like, don't you? Everybody knows what they like, even where they know nothing else about anything.

EXCAV.

So then?

HIATUS

So then, our wine, here in Occitania. Renowned for mediocrity. But, I have some solution for that. Quite literally. You see, I've been experimenting. I've been heating an oxide of mercury. And that releases something called the 'phlogiston'.

EXCAV.

Phlogiston. Right. What, pray tell, is 'the phlogiston'?

HIATUS

Why, the phlogiston is nothing less than the fiery element found in all liquids, from water to wine to you-name-it! I know, I know! This is advanced thinking, certainly!

EXCAV.

It's over my head, friend friar! But what can one expect? The year is 1209, and the world moves much too fast!

HIATUS

Indeed, 'phlogistonic air' can make your head spin! But such air can be condensed and added to new wine – any old hodge-podge of grapes, you see – and it speeds ageing while improving taste – especially if one knows only what one likes! God's teeth, man! We can drink it within weeks, instead of waiting three or four years! Sell it, too, to the English, to drink with their boiled meat!

EXCAV.

Hodge-podge? You mean a blend. A table wine.

HIATUS

No, my friend. Nothing so common. I mean something that resounds of terroir! Perhaps a new variety: 'shiraz-medoc langed'oc'. Or, 'pinot bleu sauvignon'. Come, we'll talk further upon this topic o'er re-filled glasses of vin de pays!

EXCAV.

Right you are, it's time to fly! I know a place, in this happy hour...

HIATUS

But first things first. Tell me. What about Clotilde?

EXCAV.

Well, there's little to say really...

[EXEUNT]

[Interlude: Poulenc, *Française d'après Claude Gervaise* (16^e siècle)]

ACT TWO, Scene 3

(That evening, in a room with weapons, armor, family portraits, and a small shrine)

[ENTER: RAYMOND-ROGER and AGNES, slowly]

AGNES

Nothing. Thierry says nothing. No pigeons, no messages.

RAY.

No responses, then. Or falcons may have intercepted them. And you've not seen Denys?

AGNES

No one has seen Denys – not here, not in town. He has simply vanished.
(Gathers her thoughts) Will you look for him?

RAY.

Maybe. Maybe not. I've this intuition that he's holding something back. I'm sure of it. There's something he has not told me.

AGNES

That's possible. Yes, perhaps he changed his mind, once he arrived. One could think that. I mean, why else would he leave Toulouse as he did? The vows?! Please, Raymond. One can die in a forest as readily there as here, I should think.

RAY.

He may have hoped that rain and cold – or exhaustion – or even an ambush! – would make an end, before his arrival. But that's not he, is it? Not really. Too independent, our Denys. Is it possible he could have changed so? No. I don't think so.

AGNES

You don't *like* to think so! One cannot deny he was in a state, or that he wasn't thinking clearly, at all. Besides, he's tried before, don't forget. Twice!

RAY.

You know Denys and his sense of the absurd! He's always taking things to the limit, if he finds something ridiculous. *All that* was simply *reductio* – a demonstration!

AGNES

You are making excuses, my love. Plausible denials. Rationalizations.

RAY.

Oh, please, give me some credit!

AGNES

We all have blind spots, my lord... even you. Think on it. An army is marching down from the north. You know that. The pontiff has promised lands and title. You know that. Philippe Augustus works to extend his power. You know that. Raymond of Toulouse cannot stand alone. You know that. Pedro of Aragon cannot fight on two fronts. You know that. The counts of Barcelona are...

RAY.

Yes, yes – I know! Just as you say, I know!

AGNES

Well, then. Denys.

RAY.

Denys, yes. You are right, you are right! But everything you say is exactly why I think Denys has not told all!

AGNES

That's possible. And maybe, once he came here, he saw there was no point.

RAY.

No point? Hmm. Now that *does* sound like Denys.

AGNES

Well then, will you look for him?

RAY.

He may not wish to be found. Besides, where would one look? Nor is there time, with everything happening this suddenly! Even as we speak, the northern knights swoop down on Toulouse like a hawk upon a ptarmigan! Then they'll strike our fair Carcassonne. God's teeth, we are ill prepared! Our walls are strong, but stores are low – and the harvest...

AGNES

They will trample our fields, surely! Or eat like ten thousand locusts!

RAY.

You know their number, then.

AGNES

How now, my lord? I was just speaking figuratively.

RAY.

All the same, you figured justly. Their strength is ten thousand. Now it comes down to me... whose fault is to be ill prepared. (Looking at portraits) I cannot cease wondering what they must be thinking of me! My grandfather, here, was never ill prepared. Do you think he is looking down? (Shakes his head) Rue the day, Agnes, when troubadours and trouveres set themselves to sing of me. Raymond the Unready! You can almost hear them now! "Were there signs? Tra-la! Did he note? Tra-la! How he dithered and danced, tra-la-la!!"

AGNES

Stop it! Why so harsh? Why this chastisement? Of course you are unprepared! How could you be otherwise? You will never be as prepared as they.

RAY.

And why is that? Not up to the mark! I agree with your meaning.

AGNES

Not mine at all! I mean that you, Raymond-Roger... you are not as they! Eyes with cataracts would see the difference! Shall I make a comparison? I find them mean-spirited and single-minded. Intractable and implacable! They fear all they do not understand, while you fret you may misunderstand. You are generous. You have an open and capacious mind. Nor are they are peaceable, like you. They could never live and let live for fear someone may think them weak!

RAY.

Ten thousand soldiers afoot, my Agnes, care not what others think. With their volition subordinated, men are mere ants. A swarming army is an entity without empathy.

AGNES

It is as I said. They will force us to be as they are, lest our ideals betray us all. What can anyone do? What will you do?

RAY.

Warn the people. Fortify the walls. Put up what stores we can.

AGNES

And send more pigeons!

RAY.

(Wearily) Yes, send more pigeons.

AGNES

O, pardon! C'est une bêtise! But it's getting late, Raymond. Please, can we put this seriousness aside? Just for now. We shan't misplace it. I am certain we will find it waiting for us, in the morning.

RAY.

All right. As you say. Off to bed, then.

AGNES

Good. (Searching his face) But are you coming?

RAY.

Presently. I need to speak with Excavatus.

AGNES

(Shaking her head) You and Excavatus.

RAY.

Yes, Excavatus. I really do need to speak with him.

AGNES

Well, I'm off to bed. (Kisses him) Don't be up all hours, do you hear?

[EXIT: AGNES]

[RAYMOND-ROGER watches her departure, looks around, and then addresses a portrait]

RAY.

Well, Grandfather – what would you do, were you your grandson? Believe me: he would send you a pigeon, if he could.

[ENTER: From behind a screen, a stealthy ASSASSIN. He grips a dagger. His face is covered, and he approaches slowly, on cat's paws]

RAY.

(Turning) Agnes? (Now startled) Who goes?!

(The ASSASSIN rushes RAYMOND-ROGER and they grapple.

ASSASSIN

Infidel!

RAY.

(Calling out) Guards! Guards! (He clasps the assassin's wrist and wrests the dagger free. It falls to the floor.)

[ENTER: TWO GUARDS, one drawing a sword]

RAY.

Seize him!

(The GUARDS take hold of the ASSASSIN. RAYMOND-ROGER looks at his hand)

1st GUARD

My lord, you're bleeding!

RAY.

(Looks at his hand) Indeed! (Commandingly) How did this man get in?

1st GUARD

Why, he's kitchen help, my lord! (Twisting the Assassin's arm) Peels potatoes, don't you, laddie?

2nd GUARD

Not quite! I know this face! He's the new sous-chef!

RAY.

Sous-chef?! Bloody hell!

ASSASSIN

(To Raymond-Roger, sarcastically) In deed! In Carcassone, all is well, bloody hell! There are fish in the streams and millet in the fields! Oh, how people prosper! If they like, they may trade a horse for an elephant – when they're not fornicating with infidels!

RAY.

What? (To the guards) Is this man moonstruck?

1st GUARD

(To the assassin) Hold your tongue, or I'll yank it out!

2nd GUARD

And feed it to his lordship's dog!

RAY.

Just take him away! The dungeon, for now. We'll sort it out in the morning.

2nd GUARD

The dungeon it is. (To the Assassin) Move, you bastard!

RAY.

(Staying him) Wait a moment. You are Clotilde's brother, are you not?

2nd GUARD

Yes, my lord. That I am.

RAY.

I thought so. She is well, then?

2nd GUARD

Well enough, my lord. Is something wrong?

RAY.

No, no. Lady Agnes finds her quite agreeable. Tell me, is Clotilde to marry?

2nd GUARD

Not that I know, my lord! Why, if I may ask?

RAY.

Just guessing. Lady Agnes wished to tell me something of her, but we have yet to speak on it. Lately, there's been little time for anything except knife-wielding sous-chefs.

2nd GUARD

(Laughs) Indeed, my lord! When I see Clotilde, I'll say that you mentioned her.

RAY.

Do that. Now, if you please, remove this lunatic.

GUARDS

My lord! / Yes, my lord!

[EXEUNT, GUARDS with ASSASSIN]

RAY.

(Looking at his hand) Oh, fine! Wonderful! Now where the hell's Excavatus?

[EXIT, RAYMOND-ROGER. Lights down]

[Interlude: Poulenc, *Improvisation No. 3*]

ACT 2, Scene 4

[ENTER: RAYMOND-ROGER, hand wrapped, and EXCAVATUS, mid-sentence]

EXCAV.

...and as you've asked, my lord, that's what I see. But then... my lord well knows I am disinclined to optimism – being only a fool, and not a merchant of cloth or a monger of fish.

RAY.

Good for that! Why do you think we talk? One must say things as they are – and you, disruptive cockatoo, are never a parrot of the status quo! So squawk as you please – and again, good for that! Your eye is clear. And here we are – in narrow straits, you say. Coercion is coming to Carcassone – and why, because this place is not Rome or Bagdad or Constantinople. Here, all may breathe. None lose their livelihood or hear fists on a door at three in the morning. Within these walls, none goes unprotected, whether Cathar or Catholic, Muslim or Jew.

EXCAV.

By the sound of it, my lord, you prepare to address your people. Indeed, 'tis time for that. But many among them... how shall I say it? Many are circumspect and breed mistrust, each of the other.

RAY.

Yes, some are circumspect. Yet they trade together, one with the other. There is seeming concord among buyers and sellers. They dwell side by side – even work side by side. Do not their children play together, unless an elder steps in to forbid it? Why the stoppage? Are children any the worse for their playing together? Why then, such suspicion and mistrust?

EXCAV.

History, my lord – sins and evasions we teach our children, who then teach their children. Beyond that, buyers and sellers have different beliefs. Even moneychangers disagree, one from another – over rates of exchange, if nothing else. And then there are the true believers, for whom an open gate is a portal for unwelcome ideas. Different views breed uncertainty. Nor can true belief abide ambiguity. Many become defensive, and militancy arises. One who takes doubt for weakness and ignorance for stupidity would surely be loath to admit knowing nothing at all for a certainty. Then what? As I say, ranks begin to close, and discourse devolves to the point of a dagger. Surely some would die before admitting to doubt, and some would kill before learning tolerance. Or be killed, for that matter. (Takes a deep breath and exhales slowly) But then you, my lord, when you speak to the people – how will you persuade? By a call to arms in

defense of doubt? (Shaking his head) I cannot imagine it. (Pauses) Men may fight for a faith, my lord, but no one defends a doubt.

RAY.

My friend, you sound ever more like Agnes.

EXCAV.

Do I? Surely my lord would agree that one might sound worse. And if we do sound alike, then Lady Agnes must be asking herself what is it, exactly, with these knights from the north? Are they all of a type? And what drives them? They march all the way to Jerusalem under Godfrey Bouillon, take the city from the Muslims, and make Baldwin their king. Ere long comes Hugh de Payns, marching along with his relatives. Why have they come to Jerusalem? To approach the next Baldwin for permission to establish an order of knighthood under a vow of poverty – poor knights to protect Solomon's temple. Ostensibly. And how rich are they now?

RAY.

Rich enough, these Knights of the Temple. But not all are Templars.

EXCAV.

Christian soldiers! Militias of monks and bankers! And now the grandsons of these celibates are coming against us! For what, land and title?

RAY.

Not amongst the rank and file, surely.

EXCAV.

Why then, my lord?

RAY.

No doubt some seek adventure... or escape. Yet again, friend Excavatus, think of your man, Godfrey. He sold his lands to finance the expedition. Once victorious, he refused to be king in Jerusalem. What make you of that?

EXCAV.

I take your point, my lord. Not everyone is driven by power or gold. Some are driven by conviction no less than are the Muslims of Medina. Nevertheless... nevertheless. Such astound me with the purity of their certainty!

RAY.

Or do you mean the certainty of their purity? John and Evelyn, for example. For all their good intentions of late, I miss them not. Lady Agnes thinks they followed Denys into the forest. Either that or the Bishop of Albi has recalled them on report of the northern advance. But I digress.

EXCAV.

I think not, my lord. It's all of a piece, isn't it? How strange, these self-anointed instruments of God! Sewing confusion among those without a needle's worth of discernment! What is a nitwit to make of such nattering? One paragon of virtue declares one thing, the other another. And from the sincerest conviction – or so seeming, I say – and each is incensed by the other's doctrine or divine revelation! And to what effect, may one ask?

RAY.

Oh, the answer's as simple as *pi* r-squared! When ideas are on offer, heads get jostled – but *why* should that bruise the brain? After all, "Know thyself," the oracle tells us – and remember the value of an unexamined life? You see, I have one faith, my friend: those nitwits of yours are capable of sorting things for themselves. Sooner or later. At long last, if you will.

EXCAV.

But irreconcilable differences remain. Ideas are worlds unto themselves, one colliding with the other.

RAY.

A world of ideas, then, and every idea with its opposite. So one takes the world as it is: up-down, left-right, inside-outside... a world of oppositions. Inescapable, or so it seems. Oppositions always cut two ways, don't they, and only two ways. Always inside or outside!

EXCAV.

Ah, something may be neither inside nor outside. Something may be standing on the threshold, is that what you are implying?

RAY.

I don't know.

EXCAV.

But could one remain on a threshold? Whereas, one might be inside or outside indefinitely.

RAY.

Metaphor, Excavatus. Beware all slippery metaphors!

EXCAV.

I'll stay on guard! (Pausing) And that cut, my lord? What of your poor hand?

RAY.

My poor hand? Well, the cut's deep enough for a blood oath, but one plays the cards one is dealt – unless thy hand offends thee; in which case, cut it off. You see what I mean.

EXCAV.

But this is wordplay, my lord. The association is willful. The slippage is voluntary.

RAY.

Volente deum, plaise à Dieu – or something like that. How might we translate it? Would we argue over words as we argue 'round ideas – and then make an argument how best to construct an argument? Words upon words, Excavatus. But again, I digress.

EXCAV.

Hmm. Is there any danger of you becoming Secundus the Second?

RAY.

What, *I* stop talking altogether? That'll be the day! But who knows? Some say anything is possible. At the same time, we waste time waiting for it, do we not?

EXCAV.

Waiting for *it*, my lord? For you to stop talking – is that your meaning?

RAY.

No. I mean the army of ten thousand. We are wasting time talking about talking, rather than making ourselves ready. As you say, there's a wolf at the door.

EXCAV.

Agreed, my lord. For that reason, it is safe to say... Soft, we have visitors!
(Aside) Speak of the devil!

[ENTER: JOHN CHRYSALIS and EVELYN RUAH, with FIFI on a lead]

RAY.

Why, Fifi! Good dog! Have you brought John and Evelyn? Or perhaps it's the other way 'round.

EVE.

(Commences praying in an undertone) Our Father, who art in heaven... (etc. then repeating twice)

JOHN

You were attacked, my lord! The news came to us in the forest.

RAY.

Then these walls have ears. Tell me: how *is* my cousin, Denys?

JOHN

We left him resting comfortably upon a bed of wet leaves, my lord.

RAY.

(Flatly) Is he now...

JOHN

And your attacker? What doubt could there be? He is from Arnauldus Amalrici!

RAY.

I think you mean Arnaud Amaury. In the Occitan, we try to avoid Latinate construction.

JOHN

Aye, Latin! It reeks of Rome. Woe betide he who e'er learnt it, for it spills out of its own accord! I beg pardon and confess: before this flesh became Perfect, it was Trappist.

RAY

Trappist? Hear that, Excavatus? Our John was a brew-master!

EXCAV.

Ah ... now there's a calling worthy of beatitude!

JOHN

Ye mock what ye do not understand.

RAY.

Don't we all! But John, at this hour... what brings you with Fifi?

JOHN

We thought to return Fifi to Lady Agnes. The dog was unsettled, running to and fro! You would have thought Fifi chased after a cat, except for all the tearing back and forth!

RAY.

Odd. That Fifi should be loose, I mean. Then a door is ajar.

JOHN

But your attacker...

RAY.

Yes, the man with the dagger. He's being held. There's nothing more we know. Not tonight. Tomorrow is another day.

JOHN

He's from Amalrici, I say. Sorry. Amaury, that Devil's apprentice!

RAY.

Perhaps. In any case, a bloodied dagger is a harbinger of one sort or another.

JOHN

(Quoting) *"It is an evil and adulterous generation that seeks a sign!"*

EXCAV.

Really? (Quoting in return) *"Can ye not read the signs of the times?"* Methinks only a fool is heedless, John Chrysalis.

JOHN

Even the Devil can quote scripture!

EXCAV.

Well, as we both quote, then who is who?

EVE.

(Immediately returns to reciting the prayer) Our Father who art in heaven... (etc)

JOHN

(Handing the lead to Raymond-Roger) Here, my lord. We leave Fifi in her master's restrained and steady hands.

RAY.

(Accepting the lead) Thank you, John. Now, I must bid you good night.

JOHN

(Acquiescing) As my lord wishes. Sleep well, then.

EXCAV.

And you, John. Don't let the bedbugs bite.

[EXEUNT, JOHN and EVELYN]

EXCAV.

Apologies, my lord. I'm afraid that John brings out the best in me.

RAY.

There's no need for apology. None at all. But there is one thing, Excavatus – something still in my ear. I can hear him – our knife-wielding night visitor. He called me 'infidel'. Not 'heretic', mind you. *Infidel*.

EXCAV.

What's the difference?

RAY.

Ask the Schoolmen in Paris. Abélard probably argued the point. But practically speaking, it's a distinction without a difference – except that emissaries from Rome are inclined to say 'heretic', that's all. You see, Excavatus, our visitor accused this city of adultery with infidels.

EXCAV.

Did he! Infidelity with infidels? Well... how could it be otherwise?

RAY.

Hmm. You know, Excavatus, the thought of Trappist beer brings on a powerful thirst. I believe it's time we bathe in a beatific light. What say you?

EXCAV.

Y'think Fifi can find the keg room?

RAY.

There's one way to find out. (Tugs the lead) C'mon Fifi. Take us to the beer!

[EXEUNT, and lights down]

[Interlude: Poulenc, *Cinq Impromptus* No. 3 - Très modéré]

ACT TWO, Scene 5

(Mid-morning of the following day, in a courtyard of the chateau)

[ENTER: RAYMOND-ROGER and AGNES who seat themselves upon a stone bench]

RAY.

...*not* that I wish to change the subject.

AGNES

Why *of course* not to change the subject!

RAY.

Not to change the subject, *but*... I know I've been distracted, but at least I have not forgot. You told me there is a matter you wish to discuss. When was it, yesterday – or the day before? You said it has to do with Clotilde.

AGNES

Clotilde? Oh, that! Actually, I'm the one who's forgot! It was nothing, really. Clotilde was in need of money. I said that I would help; so, naturally...

RAY.

Yes, of course. I see. And now?

AGNES

It's worked itself out. Clotilde says she was able to meet the obligation. There's no present need, apparently.

RAY.

What was the obligation?

AGNES

She didn't say; not exactly. Her brother was in need of some small assistance.

RAY.

Ah. That's right.

AGNES

All things considered, I'm amazed that you recall it.

RAY.

To tell you the truth, so am I – what with the attack... But let's be done with that.

AGNES

Is your hand still throbbing?

RAY.

(Rising) Not so much now. Mostly sore. Quite sore. But, on the mend.

AGNES

(Rising) All right. We won't talk about it. (Following him) You worry me, Raymond-Roger. You really do.

RAY.

(Suddenly snaps his fingers) Ouch! Wrong hand! But listen, I forgot to say! It seems best to forego the tax until Spring. (Takes Agnes by the hand and begins to escort her) I've been thinking about it...

AGNES

Oh? Then perhaps you had better tell me.

[EXEUNT, BOTH]

(Thirty seconds pass, without sound or motion in the courtyard)

[ENTER: EXCAVATUS from one direction and then HIATUS from the other]

HIATUS

Ah, we've found each other! I looked for you in the market, but... My, you look like you slept in a stable!

EXCAV.

May as well have done. But no, I was all night draining a keg. Then, rather early this morning – soon after sunrise, it was – his lordship examined the attacker...

HIATUS

What?! What do you mean, 'the attacker'?

EXCAV.

Yes, the attacker. *His* attacker. Raymond-Roger was attacked with a knife – a dagger, actually. Last night. It happened last night.

HIATUS

God's teeth! I can't believe it! Heaven forfend! Who would do such a thing?

EXCAV.

Still don't know. Can't get a word out of him except a diatribe he's consigned to memory. Oft-repeated, by the sound of it. Anyway, one thing is clear: he's not from here.

HIATUS

Tell me: has the would-be assassin been put to the question?

EXCAV.

A thumbscrew, you mean? No. His lordship disapproves such devices.

HIATUS

That's commendable. But has his lordship other means to find out the truth?

EXCAV.

The truth? My good friar, under duress a man might admit fornicating with his thrice great-grandmother's dead cat!

HIATUS

Perhaps so, perhaps so. What next then?

EXCAV.

His lordship is undecided. Imprisonment, I should think – although his lordship has yet to keep anyone in the dungeon.

HIATUS

His lordship is young and idealistic.

EXCAV.

Yes. He is but twenty-four.

HIATUS

He's of a philosophical bent. He reads Aurelius. Who knows? In ten years' time, perhaps his lordship may become a Stoic – whatever that means. For all his fabled forbearance, Marcus Aurelius persecuted Christians. I cannot imagine his lordship persecuting anyone.

EXCAV.

Nor can I, I confess. Friend friar, we forget our need to settle accounts!

HIATUS

Yes, of course! How could we forget the fair Clotilde! So then, we've conspired to help her?

EXCAV.

The debt is paid. Moreover, Clotilde swears that her brother no longer bets on the butcher's blue meat to finish in the money!

HIATUS

What? Are you saying Boucher *owned* the horse?

EXCAV.

He did. But whenever Boucher has a stakes horse, the safer bet is two sous on its finishing as horse steaks! Here... (Hands Hiatus a pouch); with many thanks.

HIATUS

My pleasure! (Expansively) You see how things go 'round? From his lordship to me – rather, from his lordship to St. Peter – and then to you; and from you to Clotilde; then on to her brother; and then to Boucher, who has purchased an indulgence. Now this, back to St. Peter!

[ENTER: THIERRY, anxious and in haste]

EXCAV.

(Seeing him) Thierry! What's your hurry?

THIERRY

News! Bad news! I must find his lordship!

EXCAV.

What bad news?

THIERRY

Beziers! The city is under siege!

HIATUS

Beziers?! How is that possible?

EXCAV.

Indeed! Beziers is four hundred miles from Ile de France! It takes ten days or longer to march an army. When did we learn they were on the move?

THIERRY

Oh, that unclear message! We got it wrong! You see, the army was coming down, all right – coming down from Toulouse! *En passant*, as it were. We assumed that...

EXCAV.

Oh, damn our assumption! My fault! My fault!

HIATUS

You say they bypassed Toulouse to attack Beziers? But *Toulouse* is under interdict, not Beziers! It is *Count Raymond* who has been excommunicated!

EXCAV.

Have you heard *anything*? Any word *at all* from Count Raymond?

THIERRY

Not so much as a syllable! I don't understand it! Count Raymond's *sister* is Raymond-Roger's *mother*. If nothing else, Raymond-Roger is the Count's vassal! Gad, ye gods! Why this silence – this Olympian aloofness?!

EXCAV.

Because pigeons are fast, but falcons are faster. Your birds are being intercepted on the wing – shot down by archers or plucked from the sky. You, yourself, have said it could happen.

THIERRY

True. At times it takes luck. Five birds are unaccounted. That's half the fleet.

EXCAV.

There you are, then.

(Offstage: The sound of strong wings flapping the air)

THIERRY

Wait! (Looking up, then pointing) That's Isabelle!

EXCAV.

(Looking up) Home again! One of the missing has had a little luck! (To Thierry) Away with you, then! To the coop!

THIERRY

(Running) Right!

[EXIT, THIERRY]

(HIATUS sits down upon the bench. EXCAVATUS begins to pace)

HIATUS

Nothing good will come of this.

EXCAV.

(Stops a moment, then nods) *Too right.*

(Time passes, with HIATUS saying nothing and EXCAVATUS continuing to pace **until the audience grows restless.** Then...)

[ENTER: RAYMOND-ROGER leading THIERRY by the arm]

RAY.

Yes, I understand that! The bird came from Montpellier!

THIERRY

I don't know what else to say, my lord!

RAY.

Nor do I!

HIATUS

(Rising) My lord!

RAY.

Excavatus! Have you heard? There's a ploughman and his wife, seeking asylum. They're exhausted. They fled Beziers in the middle of the night!

EXCAV.

What say they, my lord?

RAY.

They *say* they saw their neighbors burned alive in their huts!

HIATUS

Then it's begun!

EXCAV.

What, the *Church militant*, is that it?

HIATUS

(Defensive) If it be true, not everyone in the faith condones such an action! And you know it, Excavatus!

RAY.

Enough! This is not the time! Nor the place! Pull together! We must pull together or be pulled apart!

EXCAV.

My lord, I apologize. (Turns to Hiatus) Forgive me, Friar.

HIATUS

Never mind, Excavatus. It's all right. I'm in shock, myself. A black day, this!

RAY.

Beziers, Beziers! What is happening? What is being done to my second city?

EXCAV.

What can we do, my lord?

RAY.

That's the question! (Thinking aloud) Being unprepared here, we can do nothing there. Except what? What?! Reconnaissance. Yes, that's it! We must mount a detachment, to find out whatever there is to find out. See to it, Excavatus! Send the guard. Clotilde's brother!

EXCAV.

(Bowing) Immediately, my lord.

RAY.

Well? Come away! We must do what we can!

[EXEUNT, all]

(Lights down)

[Entr'acte: Poulenc, *Trois pièces*, I. Pastorale]

ACT THREE, Scene 1

(Morning outside a tent, with soldiers in the background. In the foreground, around an upended crate serving as a table, stand TWO MARSHALS along with a stern guard who remains silent)

1st MARSHAL

It did not matter, you see. Why else would we do it? The archbishop said to kill them all! Cathar or Catholic, it mattered not. "*God will know which are his own!*" That's what he said! Why else, then, would we do it? We were promised remission of sin!

2nd MARSHAL

Yes. And alas, orders are orders. I swear to you: whether or not any sin attaches, we shall rue this day! Our grandchildren will despise us! Unless they should find themselves in our boots.

1st MARSHAL

It's done, in any case. Bygones be bygones! Besides, tactically, we had to set an example. Amaury wants us to strike fear, shock, and awe! For *this* is next. (Unrolls a map atop the crate, then jabs it with a forefinger) This is the apple *and* the plum!

2nd MARSHAL

Carcassonne! I have always wanted to see the city! But are we to do the same there as here?

[ENTER: ARNAUD AMAURY, in armor, coming out from the tent]

ARN. AM.

That has not yet been decided. It is a question to be answered only through fasting and prayer.

2nd MARSHAL

(Surprised) Your Grace! (Indicating the tent) I... we did not know...

ARN. AM.

(Coldly) No. How could you know that your archbishop recites the rosary each morning before turning his attention to the day's business... and to the evils thereof? (Crosses himself)

2nd MARSHAL

No your Grace. No! I mean, yes!

ARN. AM.

Just so, good Marshal! This morning's business is Carcassone. Have you studied the map and read the notations?

1st MARSHAL

I have, your Grace. The city cannot be taken. How is one to breach the wall? I've never seen the like! It is surely impregnable!

ARN. AM.

What makes you think that?

1st MARSHAL

Experience, your Grace! The breach would require our force plus the Archangel of Jehovah and a battalion of seraphim!

ARN. AM.

Hyperbole! You overstate the case. I have been thinking on this for weeks. Just what is it that you find so impregnable?

1st MARSHAL

Your Grace: first, the approach is difficult. Then, there are two mountainous outer walls before one arrives at the fortress proper. The ramparts are surrounded by a moat that could float a ship.

2nd MARSHAL

This is true, your Grace. Direct assault would be futile! The moats are too deep and wide to cross. The drawbridges are massive. I see no way to attack the gates at either end. Carcassone has never succumbed to siege. The city is invincible.

ARN. AM.

Is that so? Then we must devise another means to bring this bastion to its knees. I am asking for suggestions, gentlemen.

BOTH MARSHALS

(Silence)

ARN. AM.

Come now, are we helpless? Are we short of ideas? In that case, we must hope to be long on patience. Why, because we will surround the city and wait, gentlemen. We will outlast them. Why waste munitions and men? We will simply turn off the water. No one will go in, and none will come out – until Carcassone stinks to high heaven and people are up to the knees in their own filth. Think on it: The fields have yet to be harvested. Stores must be low.

They will be gleaning in the streets. Feasting upon rats! When all the rats have been roasted or eaten raw, hunger will stab them. Then, gentlemen, the gates will open and the drawbridges will be lowered. They will emerge.

2nd MARSHAL

And when they emerge?

ARN. AM.

We will greet them with the sword.

1st MARSHAL

You mean to kill them all?

ARN. AM.

Why not? God willing, of course. I should not worry over such a trifle. They are mostly Cathars in Carcassone. I doubt there will be many converts.

1st MARSHAL

When do we march, your Grace?

ARN. AM.

As soon as possible. After all... our work is finished here. But first, a toast!
(Claps his hands thrice)

[ENTER: A soldier carrying a tray supporting a carafe and three goblets. The soldier places the tray atop the map covering the crate. He pours wine into the goblets and retreats, walking backwards. ARNAUD AMAURY offers the MARSHALS each a goblet, then raises his own goblet in a toast]

ARN. AM.

Long live Beziers. And now, to Carcassone!

MARSHALS

To Carcassone!

[LIGHTS down]

[Interlude: Poulenc, *Cinq Improptus* No. 1 - Très agité]

ACT THREE, Scene 2

(Late afternoon, on a terrace raked by light that dims gradually until down)

EXCAV.

Two were killed. Only one returned, my lord.

RAY.

Gaspard. Clotilde's brother.

EXCAV.

The same. He's wounded, my lord. The nuns attend him. They say he's lost much blood.

RAY.

(Pacing now) I cannot imagine it! Beziers destroyed. Completely destroyed.

EXCAV.

Leveled, my lord, and no survivors. None. Not in the city itself. Everyone... Everyone was killed.

RAY.

How can such a thing *be*? Everything? As wanton as *that*?

EXCAV.

As indiscriminate as that – yes, my lord. Gaspard *swears* that Arnaud Amaury... No, *Arnauldus Amalrici* – *he* ordered it, and his soldiers carried it out *to the letter*. They even killed Catholics! They killed everything and everyone: every man, woman, and child; every dog and cat; every horse and cow; every chicken, duck, and goose – everything and everyone.

RAY.

Amalrici is a fiend! To take a city is one thing – but to kill *children*... that is quite another. *Then*, to kill *every* living thing? This is not war, Excavatus. This is something else. It's sheer madness!

EXCAV.

(Aloud, but to himself) No, it is 'the judgment of God'. No doubt one may make some justification for reducing Beziers to rubble and a rabble of rotting corpses. We can explain it to ourselves. Nor will Beziers be the end of it. (To Raymond-Roger) My lord, there is report that Amalrici is cutting a swath as they advance. Burning trees, vines, everything. Soldiers are sewing the fields with salt. *Nothing* will grow! Thus our Occitan is made a wasteland, starving any who escape the sword. *That* is the logic.

RAY.

Logic? *Logic?! Before long, I'll be muttering to myself! It may pass for logic, Excavatus, but it's raving lunacy! Arnaud Amaury has lost his mind.* The man is mad! Starkers! That, or the archbishop is Satan's godchild.

EXCAV.

The archbishop has made an example of Beziers. A naked threat. He may have bypassed Toulouse, but he will surely come to Carcassone! Ah, speak of the Devil...

[ENTER: JOHN CHRYSALIS and EVELYN RUAH]

EVE.

(Praying as she enters) ...and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

EXCAV.

Fine!

JOHN

Let Amaury come to Carcassone! We need not fear him or his pope!

RAY.

Whatever do you mean, John?

JOHN

God is with us. He succors those of pure understanding. Besides, Toulouse is strong and Carcassone well-fortified.

EXCAV.

An interesting profession of faith.

JOHN

Amaury shall reap the wind! He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword!

EXCAV.

Now or later?

JOHN

(Ignoring him) There is nothing to fear from Amalrici. God is with us.

RAY.

Where was God at Beziers?

JOHN

It is a matter of perspective, my lord. All must die, sooner or later – and better now than then. This world is an illusion. Death brings release! The dead of Beziers are free!

RAY.

Yes, John, I know you believe that. I know your convictions!

JOHN

But you do not share them. Why not?

RAY.

Why not?! How am I to know? Listen, John. There is a Greek philosopher of whom you must surely have heard. Anaximander. Or is it Thales? My mind is a muddle. But the thing is, an alchemist told me of him. And this Greek philosopher, whoever he is, taught that all life originates from water. It develops in stages. In fact, the alchemist says that I am nothing more than the result of some obscure eruption in the primeval ooze. If so, then so are you, John. Still, I do not see how *beings* just up and happen. I mean, what is the origin of the water?

JOHN

Water is physical. *Everything* physical has its origin in evil. What does it matter whether some Greek philosopher is correct? Tell me: what changes? It matters *not* whether our spirits are trapped in the material world or arise from a primeval ooze! Such a teaching changes nothing.

RAY.

So you have said, many times. And perhaps you are right, John. I don't know.

[ENTER: AGNES, followed by CLOTILDE and A SERVANT GIRL]

AGNES

My lord! *Why* have you not told me?

RAY.

Why have I not told you...?

AGNES

I'm not a child!

RAY.

No, you are not.

AGNES

How did I find out? Thierry. And the surgeon tending Clotilde's brother. *You* have said *nothing*.

RAY.

Why would I wish to cause you unnecessary worry, when I did not know? Not for a certainty! Confirmation came only this morning, with Gaspard – and since then I have been... (Turning to Clotilde) How is your brother?

CLOTILDE

The surgeon cannot tell me – other than he is very weak.

RAY.

Still the surgeon cannot say?

CLOTILDE

No, my lord. Poor Gaspard! I pray for him!

RAY.

Yes, do that. Do it often. (Turning to Agnes) You see how it goes?

AGNES

Yes, I know! I can see!

RAY.

Well, then?

[ENTER: a GUARD, interrupting all]

GUARD

My lord, excuse the intrusion!

RAY.

What is it?

GUARD

Friar Hiatus, my lord. He would speak with you immediately.

RAY.

Kindly conduct him.

[EXIT: GUARD]

AGNES

Now? (Frustrated) Oh, what can this be about?!

RAY.

Nothing pleasant, I should think.

[ENTER: HIATUS, followed by the GUARD]

RAY.

Pray tell. What brings you, friar?

HIATUS

A most regrettable mission.

RAY.

Yes, the archbishop has enjoined you, as it were. His Grace would have you convey, as it were, a message. In short, you are, as it were, to dictate terms.

HIATUS

My lord. (Bowing hesitantly) Would it were otherwise, my lord.

RAY.

I, too, Hiatus. Perhaps, then, it is best for you to fulfill this mission quickly.

HIATUS

Yes, my lord. But first, there is something that you should know – something that may have bearing upon your decision.

RAY.

Speak, then.

HIATUS

Count Raymond of Toulouse will not be coming to your aid. He has reached an understanding – an accommodation – with Amalrici.

AGNES

Accommodation! Your uncle has betrayed you, my husband – you, his own flesh and blood!

EXCAV.

I am certain your uncle *would not have you take it personally*, my lord. The count is a practical man. Just now, he is dog-paddling to keep his head above water.

RAY.

Then I am undone, and Carcassone is finished. (To Hiatus) What does his Grace command you to say?

HIATUS

It is cruel, my lord. Forgive me.

RAY.

There is nothing to forgive. Tell me. What says Arnauldus Amalrici?

HIATUS

His Grace states that no calamity shall befall Carcassone *if*, and only if, you give the order to open the gate and surrender yourself into his custody.

RAY.

And if I should find such terms unacceptable?

HIATUS

Then the walls will be your coffin. His Grace will starve you out; and when your people emerge, no quarter will be given. His Grace would have you consider Beziers.

RAY.

I see. Myself in exchange for the city being spared. And when am I to surrender?

HIATUS

His Grace has stated that tomorrow morning would be acceptable.

AGNES

No! Don't do it, my husband!

EVELYN

Trencavel! Hear me, Lord Trencavel! Such as this monk cannot be trusted! Nor is this army anything but demons from Hell! We cannot submit to them! But we can turn their own work against them! Starve us? Never! We will fast and pray until flesh falls away, and all

in this city are free! *Endura* for all! Everyone a Perfect! Everyone returned to the Pleroma whence they came!

(CLOTILDE and the SERVANT GIRL are unnerved and begin to beseech AGNES)

AGNES

(To Evelyn) Are you daft? (To Clotilde) I've asked the wrong person!

JOHN

(With mounting enthusiasm) Yes! Absolute renunciation! Imagine the beauty of *that* happening in this city! Think on it, Lord Trencavel!

HIATUS

(To Raymond-Roger) God's teeth! Crazy! Completely crazy!

EVELYN & JOHN

(Heedless) Our Father who art in Heaven,
hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our bread for this day, and
forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those
who trespass against us. Lead us not into
temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
Amen. (Repeat until Raymond-Roger yells)

HIATUS

God's teeth, I say!

EXCAV.

(Aside, as Evelyn prays) Our Carcassone.
Madness within, madness without.

RAY.

Ach! I *cannot* think. My head's splitting!

AGNES

I can take no more of this, my lord! Do what you must. You *know where* I'll be waiting. We must talk in private! (To Clotilde and the Servant Girl) Come away, you two!

BOTH

Yes, my lady!

RAY.

Soon, madam! As soon as I can.

[EXIT: AGNES, CLOTILDE, and the SERVANT GIRL]

RAY.

(Yelling) Enough! Enough already! Guard! Guard!

GUARD

(Standing there all along) By your command, *right here*, my lord!

RAY.

Of course you are! I know that! (Composing himself) Guard, escort these two Perfects somewhere out of ear shot.

GUARD

Where, my lord?

RAY.

Wherever. But gently!

GUARD

And the friar, my lord?

RAY.

I'll think on that. For now, just... (gestures toward John and Evelyn) ...*see* to it.

EVELYN

We will pray for you, Viscount!

RAY.

(Nods) Surely I must thank you both. Guard?

GUARD

My lord! (To John and Evelyn) You heard his lordship. Come away, please.

JOHN

Consider well, Lord Trencavel, the greater glory of Carcassone!

EXCAV.

Say good night, John.

[EXEUNT: GUARD, EVELYN, and JOHN]

HIATUS

God's teeth!

RAY.

No. *God's dentures.* Must I remind you always?

HIATUS

How can one jest at a time like this?

RAY.

How can one not?

HIATUS

My lord, these addlepates have brought the wrath of Rome upon your head!

RAY.

(Icily) Nevertheless, these addlepates have not destroyed Beziers.

HIATUS

(Reflecting) No, they have not. Nor do they surround your city. I am sorry, my lord. Truly. I regret this day. (Pauses) My lord, I must take leave. What would you have me say to Arnaud Amaury?

RAY.

Tell the Pope's emissary, his Grace the archbishop, Monsieur *Arnauldus Amalrici*, that he shall have an answer tomorrow. *After* he has said his morning prayers. Tell him that and no more, if you please.

HIATUS

(Bows) My lord. May God help you! And you, Excavatus.

[EXIT: HIATUS]

RAY.

So, here we are. Once again. At least it's quiet.

EXCAV.

You must be tired. Shall I take leave, my lord?

RAY.

No, stay. Otherwise, I'll be talking to myself. Where's my cloak? I feel cold,
Excavatus.

EXCAV.

Shall I fetch it?

RAY.

No, it would be no use. It's not really that kind of cold.

EXCAV.

(Nods) Ah.

RAY.

We are out-manned. Hopelessly so. Our strength is in our position. But, you heard Hiatus. Amaury declines to hit his head against our walls.

EXCAV.

Nor would I, were I he. An attack would be ineffectual and costly.

RAY.

Nor can we attack. Not without Toulouse. Meanwhile, the Count of Barcelona is silent. And Pedro of Aragon is silent. Perhaps we should have sent a pigeon to John of England!

EXCAV.

If only one could do that.

RAY.

Yes, if only. *Quod si solum*. A new motto for the Trencavel arms.

EXCAV.

As distasteful as I find it to be in agreement with Evelyn Ruah, she is right. You cannot trust the archbishop.

RAY.

No. But one can place a wager.

EXCAV.

A wager, my lord?

RAY.

Yes. A kind of bet with fate, or destiny, or the self-interest of others. Amalrici reduces the world to a coin toss, and uses his own coin. Is the coin weighted? That, my friend, is part of the gamble. Without food or water, this city must deliver itself. Sooner or later. On the other hand, John Chrysalis may see the prospect of mass *endura* as some gloriously ecstatic vision, but my poor imagination fails.

EXCAV.

What are you saying, my lord?

RAY.

I've already said it. This city will capitulate without the loosing of an arrow. Amalrici can wait indefinitely. We cannot. So, the question becomes how many must die before Carcassone opens its gates.

EXCAV.

Then your wager is whether he intends to keep his word, after you surrender yourself. But, my lord, there is no way to know his intention!

RAY.

I should think that knowing his intention hardly enters into it. Wouldn't you say? If there is one chance in a thousand... then I must take the archbishop at his word.

EXCAV.

You will go down, then. You have already decided. Tomorrow morning, you will surrender yourself and hope for the best.

RAY.

Tomorrow? No, not tomorrow. Now, tonight. I see no reason for the archbishop to have an undisturbed slumber. (Pulling a piece of paper from his cuff) And, come tomorrow, you will convey this order to open the gates. Careful of the seal. (Hands the paper to Excavatus)

EXCAV.

Prepared in advance? But, my lord, how could you have known Amaury's terms?

RAY.

I didn't. I promised Agnes that I would make preparation – and then thought what I might do were I attacking Carcassone. I would starve me out. It was just a guess.

EXCAV.

Does Lady Agnes know? Have you told her your intention?

RAY.

No. I cannot. I want you to tell her... tell her for me. Tell her that I could not for fear I would lose all my nerve... upon seeing her face. Do this! Promise me!

EXCAV.

Yes, my lord, I promise. I will tell her those very words.

[LIGHTS down]

[Interlude: Poulenc, *Suite française*; II. Pavane (Grave et mélancolique) - piano transcription]

ACT THREE, Scene 3

(The following day, in the dungeon at Carcassone. We see a block of five small cells, three of which are empty. A man no more than a cipher is sitting in the shadows of the second cell. In the fourth cell, another man is standing. He clasps one hand behind his back, turned away. Two watchful guards are standing post at either end of the cellblock, while a third guard dozes in a hammock strung between posts. Nearby, a stool supports an hour glass.)

GUARD 1

(Indicating the hour glass to the other guard) Go on, turn it. Another run-through and you take the hammock.

GUARD 2

In a moment. There's some grains yet. Wouldn't cheat him any more than I'd dare to cheat you!

GUARD 1

Ah, piss! What difference does it make, a minute or two?

GUARD 2

Right. So I'll wait a minute or two.

CIPHER

All three of you can get your rest. No one here's going anywhere, anytime soon!
(Turning to the prisoner in the fourth cell) Wouldn't you agree, infidel?

(Turning to face the cipher, the prisoner reveals himself to be RAYMOND-ROGER)

RAY.

In these circumstances, wouldn't you agree, we share that pejorative.

CIPHER (i.e. ASSASSIN)

Share? What could you and I possibly '*share*', as you put it?

(GUARD 2 moves to turn the hour glass, then returns to his post)

RAY.

(Watches the guard cross back and forth, then continues) I said: *we share the same pejorative*. To you, I am an infidel. To the archbishop, I am a heretic... and *you* are the infidel. There it is: we are both infidels, you and I. Of course, *the archbishop* is an infidel, is he not? Then again, you must see that I am not *just* an infidel, but I am an infidel *and* a heretic – unless these two terms signify a distinction of some sort. Perhaps you and the archbishop can resolve this difficulty – even come to some agreement on this point.

ASSASSIN

Agreement or no, we are prisoners. We share that much, but only that much. So tell me, infidel *and* heretic, how have you come to be here, in your own dungeon!

RAY.

(Laughs mirthlessly while shaking his head) Destiny! Fate! Kismet!

ASSASSIN

Kismet? (Pointing to heaven) Allahu akbar! Kismet is the will of Allah. What do you know of the will of Allah?!

RAY.

Little, no doubt. But then, what do you know of it?

ASSASSIN

It is the will of Allah that Islam shall cleanse this world of filth and corruption. Europe's days are numbered. A land of infidels fit only to die by the sword! A frivolous people! Blasphemous! It is the will of Allah that his truly faithful should behead everyone who insults Islam or mocks his Prophet!

RAY.

Everyone? Men, women, children – why?

ASSASSIN

Either you are with us, or you are against us.

RAY.

I see.

ASSASSIN

No, you do not see. You are blinded of your own doing. You are shadow dancing with an impossibility! Open your eyes! You would be tolerant of any and all, but you may as well try to lay tiles on the sea! Why are you here? What brought you? Do you think your little peaceable kingdom can abide the likes of Arnaud Amaury, when he refuses to abide with you? And so you are here! How can it be otherwise?

RAY.

Things can always be otherwise. We choose. We can choose to live and let live.

ASSASSIN

I understand your meaning. You think I am an intolerant madman.

RAY.

Thou sayeth.

ASSASSIN

You still do not see! Amaury hates your tolerance of the Cathars. He hates your tolerance of the Jews. He may be an infidel standing in opposition to the one true God, but he is not a dreamer! The infidel knows that, in the end, *you*, yourself, must become intolerant of *his* intolerance toward those you protect! It must be so. Sooner or later! A paradox, no? Sooner or later, just to protect yourself, you must become intolerant of intolerance.

RAY.

And you? What have I done to you? Why did you attack me?

ASSASSIN

Why? It is *because of you* that this city harbors infidels! Jews! Catholics! Cathars! Cabbalists!

RAY.

But what of the Caliphate? Are not *people of the book* protected in Granada and Toledo and Cordoba? You forget Jewish stonemasons built the columns of the Great Mosque!

ASSASSIN

What of it? The mosque was built upon something the Visigoths threw up! And the Visigoths have since been buried. It is the will of Allah.

RAY.

Muslims, Christians, Jews – all are *people of the book*, are they not?

ASSASSIN

But only the Koran remains undefiled! Your scriptures are corrupt. They have been tampered in transmission! Hebrew, Greek, Latin... all of it!

RAY.

Yet Islam accepts them! And if corrupt, why did God allow that to happen?

ASSASSIN

Beware blasphemy! You are clever, infidel! As clever as Satan!

RAY.

No. If I were as clever as that, you would not find me here.

ASSASSIN

Ah! Then nor am I clever. Is that it? Well, perhaps. We may share that much.

RAY.

Yes. We share that, as well.

GUARD 1

Silence! Enough yammering! Keep your nonsense to yourselves.

GUARD 2

Psssh! Religion! The sun and seasons are all any man needs! They are all any man knows. But then, what do we know of them? Here it is August, and it feels like November. Cold and damp. And here we are, below ground. So, shut your mouths. Things are bad enough! (To the other guard) What's the time?

GUARD 1

(Glances at the hourglass) Be patient. The sand is falling. The glass is emptying.

GUARD 2

Is the glass half-empty or half-full?

GUARD 1

Hummph! Very funny. You got me there.

[LIGHTS down]

[Interlude: Poulenc, *Suite Française*, V. Bransle de Champagne (Modéré, mais sans lenteur) – piano transcription]

ACT THREE, Scene 4

(A hall in the chateau. Everyone is gathered: AGNES, EXCAVATUS, HIATUS, THIERRY, JOHN CHRYSALIS, EVELYN, CLOTILDE, the SERVING GIRL, the two ASSAYERS. They are surrounded by GUARDS and SOLDIERS)

HIATUS

Intolerable! The walls have ears and eyes; the market teems with soldiers and spies. Who is who? Whom can you trust? Some bird tweets and everyone notes it.

THIERRY

They've killed my birds. All of them! They're roasting on a spit! And we are next. You know what happened at Beziers!

EXCAV.

Ah, me. Last year. Last month. Last week. Even yesterday. It all seems a world away. Lost now. Gone. So tell me, Friar, if you can. How is it we never understand what we have, until it has been taken from us?

HIATUS

My friend, I was about to ask you to tell me, not that I expected an answer! Here we are, pressed into this place. I'm not sure the soldiers are sure what to do! It's a muddle.

EXCAV.

The world is a muddle, because we meddle. Look at this... these mercenaries of Rome, ready to plunder and pillage. What restrains them? Why do they wait? They'll make an end of us. Carcassonne will be Beziers! Then who's next? Albi? Toulouse? Montpellier?

[ENTER: a GUARD, pushing DENYS, who is wrapped in a cloth]

HIATUS

What? You too?! Denys!

GUARD

(With a final push at Denys) You... Over there with the rest!

AGNES

Oh, my God! Denys! I... We thought you were... But here you are! (Kisses him on the cheek) Still our Denys! None the worse for wear!

DENYS

A kiss? Now there's a first! Yes, Agnes. Sound the trumpet! What's left of me has arrived!

(JOHN and EVELYN approach the new arrival)

JOHN

I thought we left you in the forest! Why are you here?

DENYS

Because I've so missed you, John! And some soldiers were kind enough to guide me to your presence.

JOHN

I don't mean here, in this place! I mean *here*, in this world! Why are you here?

DENYS

My dear John, *a person's life* may be easily squashed, but *life itself* is not so easy to extinguish. It is not I who keep breathing, John. Something makes me breathe! And it's quite stubbornly persistent!

JOHN

The breath is the spirit, is it not! We are spirit!

EVELYN

(Begins to pray) Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in...

(A GUARD points his lance at her)

GUARD

Stifle, heretic! You pray blasphemy!

DENYS

Let it be, Evelyn. Enough now. (To Hiatus) Ah, a sight for sore eyes! Are these accommodations to your liking, friend friar? The city appears to have changed in my absence.

HIATUS

Indeed it has, Denys. Once we had our wine, our music – our companionable benches and comfortable chairs. All was well, or seeming so.

AGNES

Alas, for Carcassone!

DENYS

And my cousin? Where is Raymond-Roger?

AGNES

He has surrendered himself... in exchange for the city! I could not dissuade him.

HIATUS

Lord Trencavel was adamant, Lord Denys. He said he was making a... not a wager against fortune, but a bet on circumstance!

DENYS

What does this mean? Excavatus?

EXCAV.

I cannot say, Lord Denys. By the way, you're looking well, all things considered.

EVELYN

Well, you say, but compromised! He should be lying stone cold in the forest, seeking the highest! Don't you understand? His spirit is compromised!

HIATUS

Please! In this world base appetites are the only attributes of a man that remain uncompromised. Why else have we need of God's grace?

(The GUARD moves to intervene a second time)

GUARD

Did you hear me? I said stifle! All of you! (To Evelyn) Or would you rather I unbutton and fill your mouth?!

JOHN

No, Friar. There is pure light and pure baseness, as we see!

GUARD

(Hits John with his pike) You, too! You want this up your arse?!

AGNES

Enough now, all of you! Hold your tongues for once!

GUARD

(Sarcastically) That's right, y'all listen to her ladyship! (Bows to Agnes with an awkward and exaggerated flourish) Her ladyship knows what's good for yuhs... (grabs Agnes under the chin) ...don't ya, yer ladyship?

CLOTILDE

My lady! (Hits the Guard) You're a brute!

GUARD

(Releasing Agnes) Ha! Now here's a feisty one! And breasts like ripe apples! (Makes a grab) Me old dad tells me to pluck 'em! (Pulls up her skirts) But let's have a look-see first, shall we?

[ENTER: two MARSHALS, coming directly toward the fracas]

1st MARSHAL

Unhand her! Stand your post!

GUARD

Sir!

2nd MARSHAL

This is Carcassone, not Beziers!

EXCAV.

(To Hiatus) What was that?

HIATUS

Daylight, maybe!

2nd MARSHAL

(To Clotilde) Apologies, my pretty one. It's been a long march, and the men are... well, they are men, after all.

1st MARSHAL

But soldiers first. (To the Guard) With order and discipline, above all.

GUARD

(Snapping to attention) Sir!

1st MARSHAL

(To Hiatus) I would have a word, privately, good friar.

HIATUS

A word with me?

1st MARSHAL

Yes, with you. Right now, if you please. This way...

(HIATUS follows the MARSHAL to the side, where they converse inaudibly)

2nd MARSHAL

(To Clotilde) I would know your name, lass. What is it?

CLOTILDE

Clotilde. (Curtseys) Sir.

2nd MARSHAL

Tell me. Are you afraid, Clotilde?

CLOTILDE

Yes, sir.

2nd MARSHAL

(Nods in acknowledgement, then turns to Agnes) Your ladyship will excuse me?

AGNES

If you so order.

2nd MARSHAL

(Chuckles) Just so.

(The 2nd MARSHAL joins with the 1st MARSHAL and HIATUS, well out of earshot)

DENYS

(To the ASSAYERS) You two still winning at backgammon?

EXCAVATUS

Oh, yes. Loaded dice. But I don't recall telling you, did I, Lord Denys?

DENYS

No, of course you didn't. Hiatus told me. And Clotilde's debt?

ASSAYER 1

My lord, she owes nothing. She is even with the house, Lord Denys.

DENYS

Of course. And you, Excavatus? How light is your purse?

EXCAVATUS

Methinks you haven't been away at all, Lord Denys. Truly, my purse is never too light. Your cousin, my lord, is ever generous.

DENYS

(Pulling the cloth about him, as if cold) So he is. But where is he now?

(HIATUS leaves the MARSHALS and comes forward to speak with EXCAVATUS by whispering in his ear. The MARSHALS trail the monk.)

HIATUS

(Pulling away from Excavatus's ear) There it is. What do I do?

EXCAV.

How poetic. We have brought nothing into the world, and we shall take nothing out. But the city will be spared.

1st MARSHAL

Correct. His Grace the archbishop has made himself quite clear. Carcassone will remain standing. Now then, Friar, would you...

HIATUS

No. I will not be an instrument! Not in this! I cannot agree to this!

2nd MARSHAL

(Coldly) Either you are with us, good friar, or you are against us.

HIATUS

God's teeth! If you must have it so, then take it that I am against you.

1st MARSHAL

Be reasonable, Friar! You would oppose his Grace *and* Holy Mother Church?

HIATUS

Are they one and the same?

1st MARSHAL

I am a soldier, good monk; not a hair-splitter. I am under orders, and you have taken vows. There's an end to it. Do your duty.

HIATUS

Not in this, I won't.

1st MARSHAL

We shall see. Guard! Seize this monk!

GUARD 1

(Responding immediately, arm-locks Hiatus from behind)

1st MARSHAL

Break it if you must! If he opens his mouth, gag him.

GUARD 1

Sir!

HIATUS

Ordering others to do your dirty work, you pusillanimous baboon!

1st MARSHAL

That's it. Gag him! (Calling to another Guard) We need help over here!

(A second GUARD lunges forward, grabbing HIATUS)

GUARD 2

(Confused) What will you, Sir?!

1st MARSHAL

Begin by tying this upstart mendicant to that post over there! And gag him! Then, get him out of my sight. Now!

GUARD 2

Sir? Get him out of sight, but tie him to that post?

1st MARSHAL

Correct. Use your initiative!

GUARD 2

Sir!

HIATUS

(Struggling) A pox upon all of you, by the Blessed Virgin! God's teeth, no! That's not my meaning! May toads give you warts! Yes, warts!

(The two GUARDS drag HIATUS to the side, then bound and gag him.)

1st MARSHAL

Hand-picked by the archbishop, too! Rabble rouser!

2nd MARSHAL

Never mind that brew-master, I'll do it. (Generally) Listen, all of you! You will depart this city immediately, attired exactly as God first made you. (Smirks) No fig leaves.

AGNES

What are you saying? You would send us out naked, with nothing!?

2nd MARSHAL

You will manage, madam. As for your clothes and goods, have no fear. They will be safe enough with us.

AGNES

And my husband? What have you done with him?

2nd MARSHAL

Lord Trencavel is unwell, madam, but resting. A touch of dysentery. Or so I have been advised.

1st MARSHAL

Remove your clothes! Everyone! Guards, see to it!

1st ASSAYER

But surely you do not mean me? I keep records! I know where to find things!

2nd ASSAYER

You need us! Who will take the inventory?

1st MARSHAL

No exceptions. Those are my orders.

2nd ASSAYER

But sir!

1st MARSHAL

Guard! See to this man! (Points to 2nd Assayer)

[GUARDS respond, as SOLDIERS grab CLOTILDE and the SERVING GIRL by the arm]

SOLDIER 1

Strip, you two! Now!

SOLDIER 2

Why not help them!

SERVING GIRL

(Shrieks) No!

CLOTILDE

Help, my lady! Thierry, help me!

THIERRY

(Intervening as best he can) Release her! Let her go!

(The SOLDIER throws THIERRY down)

SOLDIER 2

Bastard! Stay out of it! What's she to you?

1st MARSHAL

(Forcefully) Cease and desist! Stand down! I will have order! Now!

SOLDIER 2

But, sir! The order was...

1st MARSHAL

You need not tell *me* what the order was! Stand down! We are not barbarians!

2nd MARSHAL

(To Clotilde, suavely) No, we surely are not! (To the soldiers and guards) There is no need for excessive force, gentlemen. Let these good people disrobe as they will. There is no need to make a race of it. The archbishop has ordered the city to be evacuated before nightfall. All the same...

1st MARSHAL

(Generally and forcefully) Yes, all the same. Remove your clothes!

[LIGHTS down]

[Interlude: Poulenc, *Suite Française*, IV. Complainte (Calme et mélancolique) – piano transcription]

ACT THREE, Scene 5

(In the dungeon. RAYMOND-ROGER is strapped into a massive chair)

RAY.

You would condemn all of us to hellfire, then. Even the children of Beziers?

ARN. AM.

That's not mine to judge. But I would certainly send them to limbo, if I could.

RAY.

Ah, the new doctrine. Abelard's *limbo*. And Pope Innocent supports it?

ARN. AM.

He does, yes. His Holiness confirms its existence.

[ENTER: a SOLDIER leading HIATUS, who is bound from behind and gagged.]

ARN. AM.

(Seeing them) What's this, then?

SOLDIER

By order of the Marshal, your Grace. I'm to lock him up.

ARN. AM.

Well then, be quick about it! (To Raymond-Roger) Anything else to say?

RAY.

How will history regard what you have done – what you and your army unleashed at Beziers? Was it God's work? *Opus dei*? I have it. Mayhap some future apologist will ascribe Beziers to the excessive virility of Holy Mother Church.

ARN. AM.

One hopes it would be more accurately described as 'war, spiritual and material'.

RAY.

Of course. Why mince words! Whatever would happen to objectivity, should we speak of slashed throats, severed limbs, and burnt babies? 'Spiritual and material'. Much better.

ARN. AM.

My young viscount, there is the church *militant* and the church *triumphant*. In this hour, do you expect Holy Mother Church to adopt the feminine virtues? Ends and means, means and ends. Again, the church *militant* and the church *triumphant*. One must learn to make distinctions. Even the Prince of Peace promises to return with a sword – *this*, after telling Peter to put his sword away. This seeming contradiction has come down to us. *It is written*. We must implement the distinction. However, admittedly, *ecclesia militans* does not mean 'crusade' – not *per se*.

RAY.

Ah, better still: *per se*. Surely the Jesuits can serve up some further clarification.

ARN. AM.

Were you older, I should think you an arrogant ass – but, as it is, we might charitably ascribe your naivety to simple ignorance. Or, perhaps, to inexperience. You suppose that everyone may pick and choose between ideas, as if they were fish in the market. Just put some in a basket and go. You think this is freedom. But this so-called freedom is an infection that leads to nothing but contention, the disease of discord, just like Satan. This disease begins with the most subtle stubbornness. This stubbornness is a mental block that discounts authority *à priori*. Such stubbornness raises the individual over the community. Do you really think that there can be any community, any harmony or cooperation at all, between stubborn individuals?

RAY.

I discount authority? When have I said this?

ARN. AM.

It is implicit in your actions. Those actions betray a tendency. Would you not dispense with authority altogether, in your ideal world? Of course! Imagine it! No masters, no slaves; no taxes, annates, or Peter's Pence – and, above all, no swords or pikes! Everyone living according to some golden principle or other. What? The most good for the most people? *Do* unto others? Or, maybe, *don't do* unto others that which you don't want others to do to you. Is that how you see it? *To do*, or *not to do*. Whose version shall prevail? Yours? Of course not theirs! Certainly not mine! You'd never acquiesce to mine.

RAY.

I have never sought a perfect world. Only a better one.

ARN. AM.

When you can find the time, my young viscount, read the Book of Judges. An inventory of atrocities! The last line is appallingly matter of fact: "In those days, there was no king in Israel". *So it is written*, Lord Trencavel, and so with your policies! They will lead to everything being questioned. Everything upended. Everything awash. Your policies end in *nothing*: not the rule of law, not the application of some golden principle.

RAY.

No. You are wrong. If we can envision a thing, then we can also bring it about. What was Chartres, before the foundation was laid?

ARN. AM.

You have a head full of rot, Trencavel! Harmony and peace, is that what you envision? You're a dreamer, young viscount. Do you suppose that one fine day all will come to agreement – that there will be some general concord? There would be only discord, Trencavel! Raw struggle, each at the other's throat. That would be the nature of things, were there no authority.

RAY.

And Beziers? Was that in the nature of things, as you see it?

ARN. AM.

At Beziers, a point was made. There is no need to repeat it. Have not the gates of Carcassone opened wide?

RAY.

Only because we are without water. And who saw to that?

ARN. AM.

Beside the point, my young viscount. You are evading the issue.

RAY.

Am I? And how is that?

ARN. AM.

You deceive yourself. What if most people thought as you? Would that not become the new orthodoxy? Will those who profess doubt remain tolerant of those who express certainty? Would *those who believe something* become the heretics? And when doubters like you prove intolerant of believers, how are such doubters likely to act toward those believers? Do you, for even the blink of an eye, believe that your doubters are incapable of their own Beziers?

ASSASSIN

The infidel is twisting your words, Lord Trencavel! I can hear it!

ARN. AM.

Guard! Gag that son of Satan!

ASSASSIN

Lies! The stench rises to heaven! It is you who are the son of Satan, infidel!

ARN. AM.

Gag him, I say!

[GUARDS move toward the cell and fumble with keys]

GUARD 1

(To the assassin) Stifle, dog!

GUARD 2

(Drawing a sword) Camel humper!

[The GUARDS enter the cell, force the ASSASIN to the ground, bound him and gag him]

ARN. AM.

Finally, some peace and quiet! But is this August? Where is the famed light of the Midi? (Removes a torch from the wall) It is no longer the sun, this! I have heard that, in such light, everything is horribly pure – as if between light and mirror; so one feels horribly visible, like a louse between two glass slides.

RAY.

What will happen to my wife, Archbishop?

ARN. AM.

Lady Agnes? I see her maddening.

RAY.

Growing angry or losing her mind?

ARN. AM.

She is concerned for your welfare. As you are of hers.

RAY.

And what of your promise, Archbishop? Will you spare Carcassone? And her people?

ARN. AM.

Yes, Lord Trencavel. Your city will be spared. And your people. We are not barbarians – monsters devoid of reason. What happened at Beziers... has been explained. The point was made. Because of Beziers, we shall meet little resistance. (Rather vaguely) Tens of thousands will live, as our Christian army... pacifies the region.

[ENTER: 1st MARSHAL, walking directly to the cell holding HIATUS]

1st MARSHAL

(Seeing him) Good! Bound and gagged. Not one of our own, Amalric!

ARN. AM.

(Disoriented) Recalcitrant, is he?

1st MARSHAL

More than a little. A breeder of dissension in the ranks.

ARN. AM.

A dissenter, then. I see. And what of the city? Have you evacuated the city?

1st MARSHAL

Yes, Amalric, everyone is leaving.

ARN. AM.

And why, my son, do you use my Christian name?

1st MARSHAL

(Bowing) Forgive the lapse, your Grace, but my archbishop is also a soldier – at least for the time being. I mean to say, I was speaking soldier to soldier, your Grace.

ARN. AM.

Yes, I quite understand. (Suddenly reflective) But what I don't understand is this strange... whatever is it? As though the air is suspending itself. Has stopped breathing, as it were. Yes? Why this... this...?

1st MARSHAL

It's the evacuation, your Grace. One can feel it. Always the same, that sound. Vibration from the ground. Whenever we march, feet pound, and it's the same as when one walks in the night and cannot see – yet one hears there is a wall, somewhere, on the right. A reverberation. An echo. The sound of ghosts. Who can say?

ARN. AM.

Yes, expulsion. Uh, no. I know nothing of ghosts or marching, so I hear nothing, perhaps. And feel nothing.

1st MARSHAL

Your horse can feel it. And, like me, your horse can hear it, too. Any horse that has been to war. Any horse that has looked death in the face... seen the carnage...

ARN. AM.

(Distracted) Not ghosts. Scapegoats.

1st MARSHAL

Your Grace?

ARN. AM.

Oh, nothing. It's nothing at all. Yes, yes. I understand. Our Savior, too, looked death in the face. As we all must... as we all must. And you say the city is being evacuated...?

1st MARSHAL

It is, your Grace. And, by your command, they take nothing with them. They have left the city naked as the day they were born.

ARN. AM.

(Recovering) All's well, then. (Makes the sign of the cross) Carry on. Carry on.

(EXIT: the MARSHAL, after bowing)

RAY.

You seem troubled, Archbishop.

ARN. AM.

No. Not I. Not at all.

RAY.

I am thirsty, your Grace. Please. I could almost drink gall from a sponge.

ARN. AM.

Ah. You know, it's good that one can look death in the face. Still, one hears the flapping of a billion blinking eyes. Sometimes, I mean. Anyway... Would you care for a little

light wine? I know: *appellation de pays* – a modest vintage, suitable to the occasion. A wine that fights dysentery as fire fights fire.

RAY.

Dysentery, your Grace? Fire? I confess I do not understand. Perhaps the movement of your thought is too subtle for me. Perhaps if you would...

ARN. AM.

(Interrupting) As I was saying. You are a naive dreamer, Lord Trencavel. Inexperienced. Self-assuming. Recalcitrant. A breeder of dissension and an unrepentant harbinger of heretics. *To whom much is given, much is expected.* You should know that.

RAY.

(Evenly) You've lost me. I still cannot follow what you said about...

ARN. AM.

(Interrupting) Then let me simplify matters for you, Lord Trencavel. Either you are with us, or you are against us.

RAY.

(Shakes head) That's absurdly reductive. I do not think this way. I cannot.

ARN. AM.

I see. Absurd, am I?

(ARNAUD AMAURY gestures to the GUARD to place a vise (tightened by screws) around the head of RAYMOND-ROGER)

ARN. AM.

Easy does it. Not too tight, now. Turn the screws just enough to encourage our young viscount to reconsider his mode of thought.

[LIGHTS down]

[Postlude: Poulenc, *Sonata for 2 Pianos* - I. Prologue]

ALLRIGHTS RESERVED

1975 / 2015

James Gardner